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COMPLETE

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Editor

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Front cover painting by Malcolm Smith, illustrating, "The Ultimate Weapon"

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The Editorial.....

IN the December issue of our companion science fiction magazine, IMAGINATION, (still on the stands if you missed it) we announced a new feature to be entitled: THE COSMIC PEN-CLUB. What's good for IMAGINATION is good for TALES, so we'd like to take this opportunity to announce the same feature for this magazine too. Here's what it's all about.

WE get a stack of mail each issue with reader requests for personal contact with other readers in science fiction. Naturally we can't print all these requests in our letter column. The only way we could handle the situation is through a special feature. And that's where THE COSMIC PEN-CLUB comes in.

THERE will be no dues, fees, or gimmicks of any kind. This is to be strictly a reader's service department, where guys and gals of all ages, occupations and so on can write in, tell a few things about themselves, and get in touch with other people interested in science fiction. Requirements are simple: address a letter - - or postcard - - to THE COSMIC PEN-CLUB, % *Imaginative Tales*, P.O. Box 230, Evanston, Ill. Include such pertinent information as age, sex, occupation, and a short paragraph of such information as will prove of interest to your prospec-

tive pen-friends. Brevity is important, so don't send us a lengthy letter, please! We'll do the rest by running the information in THE COSMIC PEN-CLUB section of the magazine.

NATURALLY we will not list any reader attempting to merchandise anything, or anyone attempting to violate in any way the spirit of the club. This is to be strictly a social service. And of course, first come, first served. So get your data in today!

WE just returned from New York City where we attended the 14th World Science Fiction Convention. It was a lot of fun and we not only renewed many old friendships, but made quite a few new ones too. For a full report on the Convention turn to page 46, where Ed Wood of the University of Chicago Science Fiction Club holds forth. Ed isn't exactly flattering in his report, but in all honesty he couldn't be. One thing: Ed mentions the cocktail party put on by the pros—including us. All we put up was money. The deplorable manner in which it was held was not the publishers' fault. Rest assured that before we ever contribute again we'll have something to say about how our money is spent! . . . Everything considered, we had a fine time though. Wish all of you could have been there wh

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Laird Hammill knew of the mystery world called Rhodanas. He had heard it was a planet to stay clear of, that its inhabitants held—

The Ultimate Weapon

by

S. M. Jenneshaw

L AIRD HAMMILL raced frantically through the cold night of Denerix, largest world of the Shanador system. He was somewhere on a dark, vast

plain outside the city of Lombrosa, and a half mile behind him lay the useless hulk of his burned-out landcar.

The only light was the wide



band of bright stars that was the galaxy of Shanador, glittering overhead; the only sound, the steady *tunk-tunk* of the radar-nosed pursuit robots creeping inexorably up from behind him. Desperately, Laird Hammill pounded on, clinging to the one wild hope that he would be able to avoid pursurers from the city and return safely to the scoutship he had hidden somewhere to the East.

If they caught him, it meant death. The penalty for spying is a universal constant.

As he ran, he heard the tiny

beeping of his chest-radio. The transistors in his uniform pocket were picking up some sort of message from the main Earth fleet, hovering ten thousand light-years from Shanador. Cursing annoyedly, Hammill thumbed the transmitter without breaking stride.

"This is Hammill," he muttered. "Come in, I read you. Over."

He gasped for breath. It wasn't easy to carry on a radio conversation while running for your life through pitch-black alien territory.

"Hammill, this is Flagship *Gifford*. Haven't heard from you in

three days. What's up? Over."

"Afraid I'm a lousy spy," Hammill grunted. "Right now - - uh - - I'm in the process of being run ragged by a team of Denerixian pursuit-robots. I'll report later, if I live through it. Over and out."

"Hammill!" yelled the tinny voice. "Come in, Hammill!"

"Sorry, *Gifford*. I don't have time to chat now." He jabbed the transmitter off and slowed to catch his breath and survey the situation.

Somewhere behind him, a team of tin bloodhounds was sniffing his trail, leading along the very efficient police corps of the Starlord of Denerix. The dim glow of the city of Lombrosa was just barely visible on the distant horizon.

Ahead of him, on the far side of this damned plain, was his scoutship. But he wasn't going to get there. He knew that, feeling a dull inexorability that he would be caught and executed as a spy.

The hideous sound of the pursuit-robots grew louder. Hammill grabbed for breath and started running again. He wondered how long his strength was going to hold out. The torture-chambers of the Starlord of Denerix had a well-earned reputation in the Shanador system, and Hammill wasn't too keen on getting a first-hand opinion.

AS HE THOUGHT it over, he hadn't done a very good job. He had been on Denerix a little less than a week, acting as advance-guard for the great Terran fleet that was massing to crush the Shanador Starlords.

Hammill had been assigned to scout starlord bases, probe for weak spots, look for chinks in the mighty network of force the Starlords had erected around their system. It would be sheer suicide for the fleet to attempt to attack blindly; Hammill was vital. And Hammill had failed.

His first port of call had been the city of Lombrosa, capital of Denerix, which was one of the key-worlds of the Shanador system. He had planned to infiltrate among the hired mercenaries that formed the bulk of the local encampment, find out what was going on in the system, where the troop deployment was heaviest, where the weak worlds were. Then, he would relay the information back to the waiting fleet, and they would strike.

Shanador had to be crushed. The confederacy of alien despots was known to be gathering its might for an assault on the Earth Federation itself, and in interstellar warfare it was a matter of get the first jump or none at all. Second best in an interstellar conflict was

crushing defeat; there could be only one winner.

When would Shanador strike? Earth didn't know. There was talk of a mysterious weapon the Starlords were perfecting, a deadly mental projector whose properties were vague and terrifying; there were all kinds of rumors. The time had come to rid the universe of the Starlords, that was clear.

But first I have to get out of here alive, Laird Hammill thought grimly.

He felt as if he'd been running all night, but it had only been a little over an hour since his identity had accidentally been discovered by a drunken, over-familiar giant of an infantryman. Hammill had grabbed the first landcar in sight and had raced out into the bleak, rock-studded flatlands that separated Lombrosa from the reconnoitre-point where he had hidden his scoutship. His object had been to get off Denerix as fast as possible.

He'd had a ten-minute head start, no more. Alarms had wailed dismally in the whistling-cold night, and the pursuers had set out after him. And now - -

He couldn't run forever. The landcar had overloaded - - he had not really known how to operate it - - and its turbines had flared into a bright blue flash of radiance

and choked off. Now he was on foot, with the hunters coming closer every moment.

Above, the Shanador system spread itself over the sky like a soft, lovely veil, a sprinkling of gold and blue and red and brilliant white. Under any other circumstances it might have been a really beautiful sight - - but Hammill didn't appreciate the grandeurs of the system just now. Gasping for breath, he raced onward, pulling one numbing leg after the other.

Suddenly, there was a deafening roar and the sky seemed to rain violet lightning. The endless plain was bright as day in the illumination of the flare.

"Stop running, Earthman," a cold, dry, voice said from behind him.

This was the end of the road, then. He couldn't run any further. By the light of the flare, Hammill glanced ahead and saw that they had run him right into a pocket-ended valley that terminated in a closed rut which folded around him neatly. There wasn't any place further to run to; they had bided their time, the devils, until they had him caught with nowhere to hide.

He drew his blaster and planted himself at the back end of the pocket, facing his antagonists.

"Come and get me!" he shouted

defiantly.

THERE WERE SEVEN of them, and three pursuit-robots. He caught a good glimpse of them in the dying light of the flare.

The men were Denerixians, all of them armed. One wore the dazzling cloak and tunic of the nobility, an outfit coruscating with encrusted gems and gleaming with the threads of platinum mesh sown in the cloth. The others wore the dull black uniforms of the Starlord's private police.

The three pursuit-robots were hunkered down against the ground like chromium-snouted hogs, their sensitive olfactory antennae quivering disgustingly at his spoor. They looked uglier than the barrels of seven blasters that were pointed at him.

The nobleman spoke. "Come out of there, Earthman. Don't try to fight."

"Suppose you *make* me come out," Hammill snapped. He squeezed the stud of his blaster and a rolling beam of fire spurted out, lighting up the sky the way the flare had done. He saw the charge splash in the air fruitlessly, three feet in front of the foremost of the radar-snouted robots.

"That was foolish, Hammill," the cold voice said. "We're screen-

ed against your little toy, so don't waste your energy on our time."

Without replying, Hammill fired adjusting his aim for greater depth. The same thing happened again. They *were* screened after all. He was neatly penned in.

Cursing, he holstered the useless blaster and started to walk forward. Blackness was like a cloak around him, but he knew the sharp-eyed Denerixians could probably pick him out easily. Still, what did it matter?

He summoned what little strength he had left and started to run straight at them. They weren't screened against *him*, and he wanted to vent some of his hatred before they gave him the inevitable *coup-de-grace*. Besides, a suicide charge like this might insure a quick death, instead of the lingering nightmare of the Starlord's torture chambers.

They weren't firing. He came close enough to see the gleaming butts of their blasters, and they didn't fire. He reached the nearest pursuit-robot and launched a vicious kick at its quivering snout. It recoiled and scurried away.

"All right. Stop right there," the noble ordered.

"I'm going to keep on coming," Hammill yelled. "You'll have to kill me."

He leaped over the other two

pursuit-robots and caught up with the foremost Denerixian, waiting for the flash of radiance that would leave him a charred hulk on the plain. It didn't come.

"Guns down!" he heard the noble say. His fist crashed solidly into the first man's stomach, and he followed with a roundhouse punch that knocked the man backward. Still no blast.

"What are you waiting for?" he demanded wildly. "Why don't you shoot?"

He saw the level smile on the noble's handsome, aristocratic face. "It's messy," he said. "Besides, we don't want to *kill* you."

Half-mad with rage, Hammill bunched his muscles for an assault on the grinning nobleman. But as he sprang, he saw the bejeweled dandy casually adjust his blaster to wide-beam stunning-force, and the bolt caught him in mid-leap.

The soft moist soil was like a warm bed as he fell face-first.

HAMMILL FELT as though his head had been filled with lightning - - lightning which seemed to flicker about inside his skull and strike with shattering force every few seconds.

As the noise within his mind seemed to diminish, he opened his eyes - - just a little.

"Awake, Earthling?"

It was a soft voice, but it carried undertones of vicious threat.

It was the nobleman. Still playing dead, Hammill tried to recall what had happened. When it finally made sense, he thought: *I'm still alive, then. Why?*

It was, to say the least, unusual. The Starlords of Shanador, despite their seeming enmity towards each other, all abided by the same rules: Kill the enemy!

"Don't be stubborn, Earthling," said the arrogant voice. "I know you're awake."

"Shall I wake him, Lord Kleyne?" said a harsh voice.

"No. He'll open his eyes."

Hammill opened his eyes slowly. He was lying supine on a table - - an operating table - - with his arms and legs held tight by invisible force clamps. The rubbery feeling force fields held him tightly without cutting off circulation.

But he was still alive. And as long as he was alive, he had a chance.

He turned his head as far as the force clamps would allow and looked the Starlord in the face. "Well, my lord; you've become lax - - or are you just a little late in killing me?"

The nobleman's eyes narrowed; his shoulders moved a little, moving the jeweled robe slightly. A faint grin crossed his face. "I may - -

just *may* not kill you."

Hammill flicked a suspicious glance at the noble. "What do you mean by that?"

Lord Kleyne smiled pleasantly, but ignored the question. He crossed the room, passing out of Hammill's range of vision, and his voice drifted through the room in a low murmur, as he spoke to someone Hammill had not seen.

Beads of sweat rolled down Hammill's face as he let his eyes rove over the room he was in. It was a high, vaulting chamber with clammy-looking stone walls and complex groining supporting the roof; a square-hewn window cut roughly into the rock allowed a single beam of light to enter, while glowing alpha-bulbs cast a grim illumination over the scene. It wasn't a pleasant room.

Hammill could see three black-clad Denerixian guards standing impassively nearby, watching him without the faintest sign of interest. Hanging from one wall, there was a thick, spike-studded knout, along whose corded length ran a gleaming length of wire that indicated that it was electrified. It was the only torture implement in the room, but it was enough.

After a few moments, Lord Kleyne returned.

Hammill had made up his mind by then; if there was any way out,

he'd take it. The Starlords hadn't put off killing him for no reason at all, therefore, he wasn't going to be killed - - at least not immediately.

The question was: why had his life been spared? If the Starlord had any sense at all, he should have killed the Earthman long ago. But he hadn't; therefore - -

The Starlord loomed over him, his bejewelled clothing glittering oddly in the glow from the alpha-bulbs. Again the queer smile crossed his face. "I have a use for you." He glanced up at one of the guards. "Cut the lights."

The guard reached out and touched a panel on the nearby wall. Instantly, the alpha-bulbs died into blackness, leaving Lord Kleyne illuminated only by the single lamp above the operating table.

Hammill knew what was coming and braced his mind for the onslaught.

The Starlord's eyes seemed to glow in the semi-darkness. Hammill could feel the creeping, probing tentacles of alien thought creep into his own mind. For the first time, he realized that the Starlords who ruled a galaxy, although they looked like men, were not human!

Hammill had been trained in blocking off his mind against telepathic probing. He set up the

block almost instantly, less than a millisecond after the Starlord had started to probe. But the block was like a wall made of paper; with a vicious stab, the Starlord's mental probes lanced through Hammill's mind block as though it had never been. There was a brilliant flare of thought energy in the infra-levels of the mind, and Hammill's defenses collapsed.

Hammill wanted to scream, but he couldn't. Lord Kleyne's mind held his own in a grip of steel - - and stronger than steel. There was no fighting that driving, searing beam of thought energy as it lanced through and through Hammill's very being.

As the psychic pain built up, Hammill could stand it no longer.

Less than a tenth of a second after the Starlord had begun the mental onslaught of the Earthman's mind, Hammill faded into unconsciousness . . .

LAIRD HAMMILL RAN his fingers smoothly over the control studs of the fast little speedster, his eyes watching the growing star in the forward plate. Within less than an hour, he would be on Rhodanas, after five days of ultrafast travel across intergalactic emptiness.

Five days since he had left - -
Left where?

For the first time in five days, he realized how foggy his mind had been. His brain seemed fuzzy, as though he had been doing things that - -

Things that he didn't want to do!

Acting almost instinctively, he slammed out one hand toward the control panel. His finger touched a stud, and the ship's mass-time converter died, its power cut off. The ship, deprived of the supernal power that drove it at ultralight velocities across thousands of millions of light-years of empty space, stopped dead. The star in the forward plate ceased to grow.

Hammill rubbed his temples with his palms. What had happened? Where was he? What was he doing?

It was as though he had been drugged for five days and was only now coming out of it.

Think back! Back! What had happened?

Slowly, the fog seemed to lift from his memory. He began to remember what had happened.

The Earth fleet had suffered for nearly twenty years under the ruthless invasion of the Starlord's Armada. The alien ships had come from somewhere - - no one knew where - - and had begun to blast Earth ships out of the sky. It had taken twenty years to trace the

enemy to another galaxy - - M-33 in Andromeda.

Every habitable planet in that Galaxy was ruled by one of the Starlords - - near-human, but evilly alien beings who ruled their planets with an iron hand. And the Fleet had stationed itself outside the M-33 galaxy, floating in the dead, empty blackness of intergalactic space, sending in spies to find a weak spot - - a chink in the Starlords' armor.

Hammill rubbed his fingertips over his eyes. He had landed on Denerix, one of the most powerful worlds of the M-33 galaxy, the galaxy which the Starlords called Shanador.

And then he'd been captured, and - - And what?

He couldn't remember.

He lifted his eyes to the viewplate. The star was still there, shining brightly against a sprinkling of dimmer stars. *Rhodanas*. That was the name of the star. But where had he heard it before? Why was he here? Nothing seemed to make any sense.

He remembered vaguely that someone - - some *thing* - - had invaded his mind. That was it! He hadn't been able to resist the power of that mind, but he had been able to throw it off after five days of blindly following the orders he had been given.

But what those orders were, what he was supposed to do, eluded him.

He reached out and flicked on the astronomical plates. He was near a star called Rhodanas - - but where was it? The last five days were so hazy he could not recall how he had arrived here. He tuned the astroplates into the computer banks. There was a faint hum as the computer figured his location, then the astroplates glowed with little letters which marked off the stars.

He was within a globular cluster of stars nearly a million light-years from Shanador! Smiling a little, Laird Hammill glanced admiringly at the ship he had come in. He didn't know how he'd gotten the ship, but, brother, it could really travel!

And now, by Heaven, it was going to travel right back! He had no idea why he had been sent to a mysterious star called Rhodanas, but he was dead certain that he wasn't going to stay there! He touched a control, and the ship began to pivot in space, turning her nose back toward the Shanador galaxy.

Then, without warning, the ship lurched, throwing him out of the pilot's seat. He leaped to his feet almost instantly. The star of Rhodanas was getting brighter again!

Something was pulling him toward it!

Hammill jammed his finger down on the drive button. The mass-time converters should have come on, but they didn't. None of the controls would function as they should.

He looked at the forward plate bleakly, knowing what had happened. Someone or something had trained a paramagnetic beam on the ship, and like a bit of iron being drawn toward a powerful magnet, he was being drawn helplessly toward Rhodanas!

Then he saw a planet. It was only a tiny speck at first, a glowing pinpoint of light. But as the ship approached it, it seemed to grow larger, until it was a perceptible disc. It kept on growing until it was a huge ball, filling and overflowing the edges of the viewplate.

And then he was dropping toward the surface of the green world. He could see great seas and broad continents covered by fleecy clouds. And then he was dropping through the clouds toward the ground beneath. Below him was a broad spaceport landing field surrounded by shining spires and towers, a magnificently beautiful city that gleamed in the bright sunlight.

The ship settled gently to the surface of the field.

Hammill balled his fists. He wasn't going to be easy to take.

THE AIRLOCK DOOR slid slowly open.

A figure stepped into the ship. He was a tall, youthful-looking man clad only in a gleaming web of metallic mesh. Hammill poised himself on the catwalk and hurled himself downward toward the newcomer.

He struck and rebounded off. It was as if the man were made of chrome steel and he of soap-bubbles; he made no effect on the other whatsoever.

Hammill sprang to his feet and launched a blow at the silent, strange-looking man, who had yet to take any definite action. The blow landed solidly - - but again, to no effect. The tall man only stared curiously at him, smiling warmly.

"Are you finished resisting, Hammill?" he asked suddenly, in a vibrant, resonant voice that seemed to fill the small spaceship.

"Who are you?" Hammill demanded.

"That does not matter. I have come to escort you."

Hammill scowled and darted back away from the other. "Escort me where?"

The tall man smiled sadly. "We knew you would be troublesome,

Laird Hammill." He advanced, and at that moment three men of similar appearance stepped through the airlock.

Hammill swung wildly as they closed in on him, fighting with desperation born of the nightmarishness of the situation. But the fight was over in a moment. Each of the four laid a firm hand on him, and a sudden, wordless surge of power ran through him. Suddenly, he did not want to fight them anymore.

"Who are you?" he asked again - - but this time his tone was no longer aggressive.

"We are of the world of Rhodanas. At the moment, that is all that should concern you. Come with us, now."

Unprotestingly, Hammill let them lead him through the airlock and out into the clean, fresh air of Rhodanas. A thousand unanswered questions flooded through his mind as he followed them through a rolling, wooded valley toward a high-vaulting rose-colored domed building that was visible beyond.

He was on Rhodanas - - that much was definite. The Starlords had sent him to Rhodanas with some post-hypnotic command implanted in the subliminal levels of his mind. He was on some sort of mission for them - - but what?

And had the Starlords figured on his being captured by these strange, invulnerable people? He had been snared like a small child, with hardly a struggle.

That meant he had fallen into the hands of an advanced race - - a race millenia ahead of even Earth. Who were they? What did they want with him? Hammill shook his head puzzledly as his captors led him along. He was a pawn in some three-cornered galactic chess game involving the Earth Federation, the Starlords of Shana-dor, and these mysterious Rhodanans, and he didn't care for his status at all.

AS HE WALKED with them, Laird Hammill studied the men of Rhodanas. They were handsome, tall, and well-built, but somehow they reminded Hammill of someone else - - it was as though he had seen one of these men somewhere before, but he couldn't recall where or when.

He shook his head, trying to clear it. It still seemed foggy. What the devil had happened to him?

He wanted to ask the men with him, but he knew they wouldn't tell him anything until they were ready.

As they approached the great, iridescent, rose-colored dome, he saw that it was merely a part of

the great city behind it. It was different from any city he had ever seen before; no Earth city had ever seemed so clean, so bright, so peaceful, so quiet. There were occasional murmurs of sound, like sweet strains of music that echoed hauntingly through the air and faded again, but there was no blare of horns, no rumble of heavy transportation, no roar of motors, no thunder of great rockets. He had never seen anything quite so beautiful.

They crossed the soft, green lawn toward the building. Hammill could see no opening in the smooth flawless beauty of the wall, but when they were within a few yards of it, a spot appeared and quickly dilated to reveal a round opening. From it stepped the loveliest girl Hammill had ever seen. She was wearing a close-fitting tunic, and the figure beneath was subtly rounded and desirable-looking. Her lustrous blonde hair was swept up in a chignon, reminding Hammill of the ancient carvings of the Grecian Aphrodite, the goddess of love.

She turned her cool blue eyes on him, and her soft, red mouth smiled faintly. "Your thoughts are flattering, Laird Hammill, but somewhat intimate."

Hammill was not the blushing kind, but he came near to it as

he realized that the girl had read the thoughts on the surface of his mind. "I apologize," he said.

Her smile brightened just a little. "There is no need. I'm not offended." She glanced at the tall man standing next to the Earthman. "We'll speak aloud for his benefit, Karr. The Council is waiting for him."

"Council?" asked Hammill. "Your rulers?"

The girl's silvery laughter rang in the warm air, blending with the warm grins of the men.

"No, Laird," the girl said, "we have no need of rulers here. We are not like other worlds."

"I don't understand," Hammill said. "What sort of planet is this?"

"You'll find out," she said. "There are many things you will find out."

Hammill grinned. "I'll say. I don't even know your name, you know."

"Nita," she said. "And now, let us go. The Council is waiting for you."

THEY sat behind a curving, translucent arc of glowing plastic that provided illumination for the great room. There were eight of them, men neither old nor young, their deep-set eyes warm with a wisdom and a benignity that

Hammill accepted immediately. As he stood before them, Nita at his side, the pain and terror of the last weeks seemed to wash away.

"You are Laird Hammill, of Earth," said the foremost of the eight. "Welcome to Rhodanas."

Hammill faced him squarely. "Just where am I and what is going on?"

"Patience," the Councilman said. "First - - may we have permission to enter your mind? Speaking aloud is clumsy and inefficient."

Hammill stared uncertainly at him for a long moment, remembering the flaming agony of the moment when Lord Kleyne of Denerix had broken through his barriers and probed his mind. He did not want that to happen again. But - - somehow, he trusted the Rhodanans.

"Very well," he said.

It was like stepping into a soothing raybath. The mental energy of the Rhodanans seeped into him, washed over him, left him feeling calmed and refreshed. His perceptions were heightened; he could see Nita, at his side, take on a glowing beauty that he had not known it was possible for a woman to possess, while the members of the Council grew in dignity and authority.

"Welcome to Rhodanas a second

time," the elder said. Only now his voice was an unspoken thought, and Hammill knew not only that he was Lorkan, nominal head of the Council of Rhodanas, but that he was Nita's father, and that he was on a world which far surpassed in mental power any that the galaxy had ever known.

"You could have destroyed me," he said. "Why did you bring me here?"

"We do not destroy unless we are directly threatened," Lorkan said. "And, as usual, our friends of Shanador bungled the job when they planted the command in you."

"Command?" Hammill groped for the information he lacked.

"You were sent here to steal the *hsrorn*," Lorkan said quietly.

Immediately awareness came flooding back. Hammill rocked dizzily as the pieces fell into place, as the whole picture took form and meaning and coherence.

The minds of the Rhodanans meshed with his own, and Nita's warm hand tightened in his as the dams broke and the data tumbled through him. He saw a sweeping vista of Galactic history in an instant, a record of millenia-long eras.

He knew why he was here.

IT HAD BEGUN millions of years in the distant cosmic

past, here on the world of Rhodanas. The Rhodanans, who had sprung from the same hardy stock that had gone on to give rise to the peoples of the Earth federation, had, through untold centuries of evolution, reached a state of near-perfection. They had mastered the ability of controlling the *hsrorn*.

Which was, Hammill learned in that blinding instant, the key to the conflict that threatened to consume the civilized galaxy. The *hsrorn* was a semi-living entity that resided in the hearts of suns, a light-being which existed at incalculable temperatures, neither fully alive nor totally inanimate.

The Rhodanans had mastered the skill of snapping their minds across space to the star in which lived the *hsrorn*, seizing a microscopic fragment of the light that composed the entity, and crystalizing it instantly into a lambent jewel. Hammill noticed the *hsrorn* for the first time - - a tiny bead that glistened brilliantly at the throat of each of the Rhodanans.

Mastering the *hsrorn* had been the final step in the Rhodanans' path toward perfection. Its peculiar property was its ability to act as a focus for the mental powers, to allow them to project their thoughts to one another, to enter into each other's minds, to live in perfect harmony and utter balance

with each other.

Only - - not all the Rhodanans were capable of using the *hsrorn*. In some, the genes of evil still lurked. And they, these inferior Rhodanans, were consumed with jealousy, cut off as they were from the wondrous mental blending the *hsrorn* afforded. Bitter, thwarted, twisted and warped, they banded together and attempted to steal the *hsrorn* from those Rhodanans who rightfully possessed it.

But the *hsrorn* was a weapon as well as a source of eternal harmony. Gathering their united powers and focussing their thoughts through their *hsrorn*, the Rhodanans had risen to what would be their final act of violence for all time, and in a mighty battle had swept away the outcasts. They had been hurled from Rhodanas forever.

"And now they are the Starlords,) Hammill said quietly, still shaken by the force of the experience that had poured into him.

"Yes," Lorkan said. "When we drove them away, they settled in a distant cluster, gathering themselves together in defeat. They have remained there ever since, scheming against one another and against us, caught forever in their web of destruction."

"We have nothing but pity for them," said Nita.

"They do not dare return to Rhodanas," Lorkan went on. "They fear us and they know our might. They are well aware that we could hurl them back just as easily a second time as a first.

"But you - - an Earthman - - they had hoped somehow to send you to us and have you steal the *hsrorn* for them. It was a mad plan - - but they are madmen, the Starlords."

Hammill nodded. "Yes. But suppose I did succeed in stealing the - - the *hsrorn*. What then? Do they think they could defeat you?"

"No. Not us. They want the *hsrorn* to focus their hatred against the peoples of the Earth Federation, who even now threaten to smash them."

"So they sent me here to snaffle the super-weapon that would smash my own people," Hammill said. He smiled. "But if you should *give* me the *hsrorn*, and I take it to the Earth fleet to use against the Starlords - - "

"No," Lorkan said gravely. "That would be impossible. We do not interfere in cosmic struggles."

HAMMILL FROWNED, then. "Now wait just a second. If you don't intend to do anything, why did you bring me here?"

"I will be frank with you,

Laird," the Rhodanan said. "We wouldn't have brought you here ordinarily. The so-called Starlords have sent a good many emissaries here under hypnotic compulsion. None of them have ever landed. We stopped their vessels in space long before they reached us. And, much as we dislike violence, even on a mental level, we blanked their minds and sent them away."

"Why am I so special?" Hammill asked.

Lorkan smiled. "You are the first being we have ever known who had the innate mental ability to break the mental compulsion of a Starlord. Our race - - and that includes the Starlords - - is one of vast mental powers, vaster than you know, even yet. The Starlords are the weakest of us, but no one has ever been able to break away from their mind control - - until you did.

"That's why we brought you here, Hammill. We wanted to see what kind of man you were."

Hammill was astounded. "Me? Strong mind? Why, I hardly was able to resist him more than a fraction of a second. He - - Lord Kleyne - - went through my mind block like a hot knife through butter."

"True. But you *did* resist him. Even though your block only held

for a short time, it was more than anyone else has ever done. And, too, you were able to break the compulsion after five days. And that takes strength - - *real* strength!"

Hammill felt a chill run up his back. If the Starlords were actually that strong, Earth and her Federation didn't stand a chance against the combined might of Shanador!

"Look, Lorkan," Hammill said, "you've *got* to help us! You're the people who drove those men off of Rhodanas! Now they've enslaved a whole Galaxy and are going on to more! They've got to be stopped, and you're the only one who can do it!"

Lorkan shook his head. "You don't understand. Each race must work out its own destiny: we have worked out ours, we will let others work out theirs. We do *not* interfere!"

"You won't help then?"

"We can not. I'm sorry, Hammill."

Laird Hammill's teeth were clenched. "I presume I'm free to go at any time?"

"As soon as your ship is repaired," Lorkan said. "The paramagnetic beam jammed the controls, but they will be ready soon." He asked no question; there was no need to. He knew exactly

what the Earthman was thinking, and he didn't seem to care.

"You're snobs," said Hammill. "Every one of you. You sit here on this tight little world of yours and pay no attention to what's going on in the rest of the Universe. One of these fine days, when the Starlords have conquered themselves enough territory, they'll turn on you - - and you can't fight physical force with a little telepathic compulsion!"

Lorkan only smiled. "There is some truth in that. But, remember, you don't know all of the facts. Possibly you never will. You will just have to accept our word for it."

Then Nita's thought cut across the subdued comments of the councilors. "Just a moment, please. May I speak?"

A THOUGHT OF ASSENT came from the Council.

"It has occurred to me that it may be wise to make a personal investigation of the Shanador Galaxy."

"Indeed?" came the general thought of the Council.

"And why?" thought Lorkan to his daughter. "We have them under continual mental observation. Our Observers report nothing unusual."

"Remember," said Nita, "in

spite of their weaknesses and their warped minds, the Starlords are of our race. They know us. It's possible that they may have developed a method of hiding their activities from our Observers."

Hammill kept out of it. He sensed that the girl was on his side, and she seemed to be making her point. There was no need to interrupt yet.

Lorkan was silent for a moment. Then he sent out a powerful thought. "Observers! Link up and come in with us."

In several star systems scattered throughout the local cluster, fifty Rhodanans linked their minds together to become, in effect, one mind. Then that mind sent a thought to the Council.

"What do you wish?"

The Council, too, had linked themselves together, thinking as one individual.

"Have you made the latest check on the activities of the Outcasts?"

"Shanador?" came the Observers' thought. "We have."

"Is there anything unusual to report?" the Council asked.

"Nothing," said the Observers. "They are arming, of course, and they war among themselves and with others. They have expanded in the past few centuries, but we have nothing to fear from them."

"Excellent. But is there any

chance that they may be acting in a manner which is not detectable to you?"

There was a silence for a moment, then the Observers said: "It is admittedly possible that they may have developed a method of concealing their activities from us. But the probability is so remote that we have not taken it into account. We will, however, check again. It will not take long."

"Do so," said the Council. "And this time, make a careful check for any clues that might mean that they have found a method of screening us out."

"One moment."

It had lasted only a minute fraction of a second of time, that conversation. And through it all, Hammill had listened and watched. What a people! What minds! Here was a race that could really *think!*

The answer came from the Observers. "Our results are negative. We find nothing suspicious whatsoever. No Starlord or any of his subordinates anywhere are working on any weapon or device which might prove inimical to us. And that, of course, in the light of your question, is highly suspicious in itself.

"Other than that, we have nothing to report."

"Thank you," said the Council.

The councilors unlinked their minds and became separate people once again.

Lorkan looked puzzled. "We have no evidence that there is anything wrong - - nor do you, Hammill. But, in view of the remote possibility that something may be happening of which we are utterly ignorant, we must, for our own safety, check the Galaxy of Shanador in person.

"Will you be willing to aid our agent?"

Hammill nodded. "If it will help convince you that the Starlords of Shanador are more dangerous than you think, I'll go with your agent wherever he wants to go."

"Not *he*," Lorkan said, smiling. "*She*. My daughter will go with you."

THE SMALL SHIP curved upward from the surface of Rhodanas as in a tight, smooth arc and shot away into the blackness of space. Hammill fed coordinates into the automatic pilot while Nita, at his side, watched with great interest.

"We'll return to the Earth Federation fleet," he told her, as he guided the tape into the entry slot of the computer that controlled the ship. "Then we can get our plans squared away with them."

Nita smiled. "Remember, I'm

just along as an observer on this flight. Don't start figuring either me or the *hsrorn* into your plans, Laird.

He glanced at her. She was wearing an abbreviated tunic that clung to her tightly from breast to thigh, and nestled in the valley between her full breasts was the glowing radiance of the *hsrorn*. Hammill had to force himself to recall that she was not merely another lovely girl, but a representative of the universe's wisest race.

"I think you'll see what the Starlords are up to, Nita. They're assaulting innocent races - - and if you and your people let them do it, the guilt will be on Rhodanas forever."

She shook her head. "Our custom is not to interfere," she said. "But I will see if there is justification in what you say."

He returned his attention to the drive, and worked rapidly until the ship was fully automatic. Then he moved to the sub-space radio and began setting up the coordinates that would put him in contact with the Flagship *Gifford* of the Earth Federation fleet.

There was a momentary whine and crackle of static, and then the *Gifford* came in.

"Starship *Gifford*. Starship *Gifford*. Come in, please. Over."

"*Gifford*, this is Laird Ham-

mill."

"Hammill! Where have you been?"

"It's a long story, Sparks. But I'm on the way back to the fleet with something interesting."

"You've been missing for more than a week! We'd written you off as dead."

"I'll explain it to the captain," Hammill said. "Beam me in."

"Are you crazy? In the middle of a battle?"

"*Battle?*" Hammill glanced at Nita and then back at the sub-radio. "What's happened?"

"Didn't you know? The Starlord's fleets have been on us for three days! We've been dodging where we could and fighting where we had to. We have them pretty much at a standstill now; they can't find us. But we've been completely outmaneuvered. We're outgunned and outmanned, and they are fighting us on their own territory!"

"How about reinforcements?"

"From the home Galaxy? It'll take days! By that time, we'll be wiped out, and the Starlords can set a trap for the reinforcements!" Then there was a sudden roaring crackle of static.

"*Gifford!* Battleship *Gifford!* Come in!" Hammill shouted.

But there was no answer.

Hammill clenched his fists and

glared at Nita. "That may have been a battleship exploding! Do you see what your stupid 'hands off' policy is doing? You've set a bunch of maniacs loose in the Universe, and you're doing nothing about it!"

Nita shook her head. "I'm sorry, Laird, if you think so badly of us. But don't judge us until you've uncovered all the facts."

"Men are dying out there," he said coldly.

Nita's face sobered. "Perhaps we can help them."

"How?" Hammill's voice was sarcastic. "We're only an hour out from Rhodanas! It's a five day trip from here to there, even in this ship."

Nita looked at him for a long moment before answering. Then she said: "Laird, you have a strong mind. You've got more power than you know - - perhaps more than I know. But if you push your abilities too hard and fail, you may die. Do you want to take the chance?"

"What sort of chance?"

"Would you risk your life in the off chance that you might be able to reach the Earth fleet in time to help them - - even if your help wasn't worth much?"

Hammill's face became hard. "You know damned well I would!"

"Very well, then." The girl

put her hands behind her head and unclasped the necklace that encircled her neck. The chain came away from her throat as she brought her left hand out. From her hand dangled the iridium chain - - and at the end of the chain glowed the supernal light of the tiny *hsrorn* jewel. With her right hand she reached out and cradled the scintillating gem in her palm. Then she looked again at the Earthman. "Hold my hand," she said softly, extending the palm containing the jewel.

Without hesitation, the big Earthman closed his hand over hers, clasping it as though they were lovers. Between their palms, the glowing bit of crystallized light throbbed warmly.

And, in that second, Laird Ham-mill became the first Earthman to contact the *hsrorn*.

HSRORN WAS A SYMBOL -- not a word. It was never actually meant to be pronounced in any human language. It was a concept-thought for something that could not be described in language.

Hsrorn was a being - - and yet not a being. It was a race - - and yet not a race. It was intelligent - - and yet not intelligent. In its entirety, it was entirely incomprehensible to the human mind. There

was only one—and yet there were many.

In the heart of every living star was the *hsrorn*. In every glowing star throughout the sidereal Universe - - in every one of a billion billion billion shining suns - - dwelt the *hsrorn*. Some of them - - or, perhaps, parts of it - - were stronger than others. A blue-white giant was a more powerful star than a red dwarf. But, as a whole, the *hsrorn* was more powerful, more potent, than any or all of the stars that were its components.

As a plant changes the light of a sun into heat and chemical energy, as the vast Powertapper engines of Earth's Federation bled the inconceivable nuclear power of a sun, so did the tiny jewel tap the tremendous mental energy of the uncounted suns of the Universe.

But a plant does not tap *all* the power of a sun, nor does a Powertapper engine pick up more than a tiny portion of the limitless nuclear energy of a huge star. Each is limited by its own ability to use that power.

And thus it was with the mental energies of those mighty suns - - each mind, with the aid of the jewel, could use the energy that the jewel tapped - - provided that the mind that used the jewel had

the resiliency and ability to handle the energy that poured from those tiny bits of crystallized light.

The electrical socket in an ordinary house has no ability of its own; it is merely the outlet for the tremendous energies of the generator at the power station. If something that is too weak to withstand the voltage and amperage of a household socket is plugged into it, there is a short circuit. The weak appliance burns out. But if it is used properly, the socket can feed energy into a motor or any other appliance - and that energy can be used, transmitted from a power source many miles away.

And thus it was with the *hsorn* gem; it was a power source that could be used - provided the mentality of the being using it was strong enough to stand the strain of those incomprehensible energies.

FOR A MOMENT, Hammill's mind reeled as the power from the jewel flowed through him. Then the flow stabilized, and the Earthman's mind could feel the energy backing it.

Nita's thought came into his brain, urging, pressing. *Think, Laird! Think of the ship moving! Faster! Faster! Push, Laird; aim it toward the Earth Federation fleet and push - with all your*

might!

There was a terrible rushing. Stars swam and blurred. The coupled minds of Nita and Laird Hammill slammed the tiny scoutship through space as though distance were a negligible thing - as though there were no distance at all.

Then, quite suddenly, the ship slowed.

Nita gently took her hand from Hammill's own and relocked the *hsorn* jewel about her throat. "We're here," she said gently.

Hammill glanced at the plate. There, within less than a hundred million miles, he saw the ravaging fury of a space battle.

The blackness of space was rent with the brilliant gouts of flame that told of titanic conflict. Rays splashed across the arch of the void, battered into protective screens, staggered armaments. As Hammill watched, the dull gray snout of a Shanador cruiser spurted bright green as an energy charge leaped from its fore batteries and blazed toward a retreating Terran destroyer.

The ray-charge struck. Hammill pictured vividly what must be going on aboard the ship as the screens labored valiantly to absorb the overload. Again the Shanador cruiser struck, probably raising temperatures aboard the Terran

ship to unbearable degrees.

He watched as a second Shanador vessel cruised in for the kill, orbiting silently downward and smashing through the Terran starship's defenses with a powerful caesium-beam that sizzled through screens and turned the Earth ship into a spinning husk. Another Terran ship cut upward to provide a defensive maneuver, but it was too late.

"You see what's happening?" Hammill said. "The Starlords are cutting us to pieces!"

She nodded grimly. "I see. Perhaps it is not too late to save them. Take my hand once again."

HE GRASPED HER, tingling at the contact, and felt the throbbing vibrance of the *hsorn* surge through him - - that, and the quite different throbbing vibrance of the girl's physical nearness.

"Hold me tightly," she whispered - - and for a moment it seemed that her mind was not entirely on the battle. But it was only for a moment. She stared keenly into the viewplate, searching the roaring turmoil below.

"That's the Shanador flagship," Hammill said, pointing to a long, menacing dreadnought that seemed to be controlling strategy. "We'll be best concentrating our attack there."

She nodded. Suddenly he stiffened as the *hsorn* drew on him and the girl's combined mental powers, and hurled a bolt of faint pink light down toward the cruising Shanador ship.

It enveloped the flagship like the fuzzy halo of a comet, and then the beam - - vanished! Winked out of existence!

A ripple of despair ran through him, and Hammill realized that he was linked to the girl by the *hsorn*, sharing her emotions and her reactions. Puzzled, he turned to her.

"What happened? What's wrong?"

"I don't know," she said. "Let's try again."

A second time the beam streaked toward the Shanador flagship, and a second time it was deflected and blinked out.

"I don't understand what they're doing," she said. "Unless - - yes, that must be it! They've finally developed a shield!"

Hammill whitened. "You mean the Starlords have a defense against the *hsorn*?"

"Yes and no. They can't ever be able to withstand our combined might - - but this shield can hold off whatever you and I can throw against them. At the moment, we can't stop them. I hope your friends know how to retreat swiftly."

Hammill's eyes narrowed. The Rhodanans had failed him, and he wasn't sure what to believe now. If the *hsro*n were as powerful as it was supposed to be, how could the Starlords shield against it? And why didn't the rest of the Rhodanans join in to save the Earth fleet?

There were no answers. He glanced at the girl, who was fingering the gem at her throat with nervous fingers. Her breasts rose and fell rapidly; he could see she was worried.

"Let's get out of here!" he said, and turned to the control panel. A quick look at the viewplate showed him that the Shanador fleet was in full command, with the Earth ships streaking to all corners of the cosmos in frantic and undignified retreat. Hammill's fingers played rapidly over the blasting console - - there was not time to set up the automatics - - and directed his ship out and away from the advancing Shanador fleet.

"We'll have to figure out some other line of attack. We'll - - "

The sentence was never completed. The ship came to a sudden halt, as complete as if it had run into an immovable screen in mid-space.

"They've slapped a traction beam on us," Hammill muttered. He looked around and saw the

slumped body of Nita sprawled near the wall - - the sudden jolt of deceleration had slammed her up against it with a stunning impact.

There was a twisting effect as the frozen ship dipped and whirled in space. Hammill clung to the controls and fought for consciousness. They were giving him the spin treatment, pivoting the traction on beam off one end of the ship and whirling them in a tight circle like a cat held by its tail.

Blood circled dizzily in his head as the ship went over and over. Once, he managed to glance out the plate, and saw Lord Kleyne's flagship hovering within striking distance, ready to pounce. Kleyne was no doubt enjoying the scene of Hammill's ship whirling over and over.

Hammill rocked and swung, clinging tightly to awareness. He knew why Kleyne was spinning them - - Kleyne realized there was a Rhodanan aboard, and Kleyne was taking no chances. They were trapped.

Hammill hung on a moment more, then blacked out completely. He could almost hear Kleyne's sadistic laughter now.

THE BLACKOUT didn't last more than a few seconds. When stability returned, Hammill found himself still hanging on to the wall

of the ship, holding himself erect by sheer will power.

There was a wave of searingly hot air which washed through the ship as Lord Kleyne's cruiser burned the airlock door open and clamped a tube against it before the air could escape.

The two ships were tied together now, connected by the tube which ran from the airlock of Lord Kleyne's battle cruiser to the burned lock of the little scout ship.

As he pulled himself upright, Hammill saw Lord Kleyne step into the ship from the tube. There was a sardonic smile on his lips and a semi-portable ray rifle in his arms. The radiation-blackened muzzle pointed directly at Hammill's midsection.

"Well, Earthling," the Starlord said contemptuously, "I see you've done your duty." He glanced at the supine figure of Nita, who lay unconscious on the floor.

Hammill realized instantly what the Starlord must think. Laird Hammill had been sent out, under hypnotic compulsion, to steal one of the *hsrorn* jewels from Rhodanas. Lord Kleyne thought that he had done just that!

If he could play it right, Hammill knew he could make the Starlord think he was still under com-

pulsion!

Hammill blinked. "Yes, Lord Kleyne," he said dully, "I've brought you the jewel."

The muzzle of the Starlord's ray rifle lowered a bit. He looked hungrily at the glowing bit of cold fire at Nita's throat.

"Within a short time, I shall be Starlord of Rhodanas," he said.

He was so intent upon the jewel that neither he nor the men who had followed him through the tube had seen the little ship pull up alongside the other airlock. But Hammill had seen it. Some other ship was also trying to board the scout cruiser!

Lord Kleyne stepped over to Nita and bent down. "At last! With this jewel, I shall become the greatest ruler the Universe has ever known!"

"*You'll die before then!*" said a harsh voice from the port airlock.

Lord Kleyne jerked himself erect and stared down the twin muzzles of a dimodine projector. "Lord Brannis!" he said sharply.

The man holding the dimodine projector also wore the bejewelled cloak of a Starlord of Shanador. He was shorter than Lord Kleyne, and broader of shoulder. His wide face radiated contempt and hatred.

"Well, my lord," he said sneer-

ingly, "so you have managed to get a *hsrorn* crystal, eh?"

"I intended to turn it over to the Starlords' Union," Kleyne said steadily. Out of the corners of his eyes, he could see that his own men had dropped their weapons as soon as they had been covered by the other Starlord's personal guard.

"Oh, certainly," said Lord Brannis sarcastically. "Well, I'll just take charge of that little bauble myself, Lord Kleyne."

"The Union has elected *me* Starlord of Starlords," Lord Kleyne said in a hard voice. "Would you violate the decision of the Union?"

Lord Brannis laughed harshly. "No more than you would, my lord."

Hammill had been watching the scene between the two Starlords without moving a muscle. He smiled inwardly. It was easy to see what Lorkan of Rhodanas had meant when he said that the Starlords were warped mentally; they could not even agree among themselves. In spite of their great power, they were no better than any neurotic criminal; they didn't trust each other, and probably did not even trust themselves.

There was silence for a moment as the two Starlords faced each other, each backed by his hypnotically controlled minions. The ordinary people of Shanador had no

great mental power, and were thus at the mercy of the Starlords. Even without a *hsrorn* jewel, a Starlord could control a planet. What would happen if they seized control of the gem?

Because of his own newly-found ability to handle mental energy, Hammill felt more confident in the situation than he would have before his trip to Rhodanas. Ironically, he had Lord Kleyne to thank for that.

But, as long as the Starlords both thought he was under hypnotic compulsion like the guards, he had a chance. Cautiously, he felt toward their minds with his new-found telepathic sense. He just barely touched the surface of their minds. Neither one reacted, so he went a little deeper, watching, listening, making no attempt to control them.

Lord Brannis hefted his dimodine projector and glanced at Nita. His eyes glittered evilly. "Well, *well!* Not only do we have one of the *hsrorn* jewels, but a lovely girl as well."

He started to step toward Nita, and, in that instant, Lord Kleyne acted. He sent a driving thought out to his own guards, who, under his control, cared nothing for their own lives. They brought up their weapons and fired.

But Lord Brannis had sensed

that order and had dropped to the floor, swinging his own twin-barrelled weapon about.

For an instant, the cabin was filled with the ravening flame of white-hot radiation as the rays burned their way through flesh and bone. The guards of both Starlords flared, smouldered, burned, and died - - the hot beams of their ray rifles cut both sides down within half a second.

The two Starlords, meanwhile, had fired at each other almost simultaneously. The beams met in midair, flaring blue-white and filling the cabin with heat. Both men were unharmed, but their weapons had been short-circuited. They smoked ominously and became impotent in their owners' hands.

Two Starlords, weaponless and without guards, faced each other in the control room of the tiny scout vessel, while the Earthman stood by and watched the battle to the death.

But Lord Brannis did the unexpected. Instead of trying to do battle with Lord Kleyne, either physically or mentally, he flung himself toward Nita's inert body.

When he did, Laird Hammill almost leaped to protect her. But Lord Brannis wasn't after the girl; he wanted the jewel! His hand clasped around it, and he glared

at Lord Kleyne.

It was the last act of his life. He had meant to use the *hsrorn* energy to kill Lord Kleyne. But Lord Brannis did not, by any means, have enough mental power of his own to control those supernatural energies. When he called them forth, it was as though he had touched a high-voltage wire. Like a man strapped in an electric chair, he found himself unable to resist the tremendous power behind the *hsrorn*. His mind, burned out completely by that terrible force, collapsed and died.

WITH AN EFFORT, Hammill held himself in check. At the moment, he was in no danger from Kleyne - - so long as the Starlord believed he was still under compulsion.

"Poor Brannis," Kleyne said cluckingly. "He should have known that second-rate minds have no business trying to play with the *hsrorn*. Eh, Earthling?"

Kleyne stooped and picked up the gem, carefully grasping it by its chain. *He's afraid of it*, Hammill thought. *He saw what it did to Brannis, and it scares him.*

Smiling, the Starlord pocketed the *hsrorn*. A new thought entered Hammill's mind; Suppose Kleyne *did* have enough innate mental ability to handle the

hsrorn? Would he be able to unleash a crushing attack on the rest of the galaxy? And - - more important - - would Nita's people remain so damnably detached, standing aloof so long as Kleyne didn't come near *them*?

Hammill didn't know. He longed to spring at Kleyne, to turn his aristocratic hawk's nose into a pulpy mass, to seize the *hsrorn* and restore it to its rightful place at Nita's throat, but it wouldn't be a wise move. Right now it was smarter to pretend to be a hypnotized dupe.

Kleyne spoke briefly into a hand-microphone and almost immediately half a dozen of his black-clad guards came up the tube that linked the ships.

He gestured to the inert body of Lord Brannis. "Get rid of this," he ordered. Then he turned to Hammill and the still-unconscious Nita, and indicated them to several of the guards.

"As for these two - - the Earthling's served his purpose well, and we can't let that go unrewarded. Earthling, I grant you a speedy death - - instead of the lingering one in the torture chambers!"

Hammill's face became a steely mask. This was Starlord honor, then - - not that it mattered. It was no more than he expected from Kleyne.

"What about the girl, lord?" asked a guard.

"I don't care to have her remain alive either," Kleyne said crisply. He gathered his jewelled cloak around him, and affectionately patted the pocket that contained the *hsrorn*. "That will be all," he said.

He turned imperiously and stalked away down the tube that led to his own ship, leaving Hammill and Nita in the custody of two of the guards.

The bigger of the two guards, who seemed to be the higher in rank as well, waited until the tube that linked the ships was empty. He peered down its length for a moment, then turned to the other guard.

"Hah! It would be just like our noble Starlord to sever the tube and leave us adrift in this ruined hulk!"

"The tube's all right, isn't it?" the other guard asked uneasily.

The bigger one nodded. "But let's finish these two off quickly. I don't know how long we can trust our luck to this derelict."

Then his eyes fell on Nita, and he smiled. "Hmm - - maybe we'll take a little extra time after all," he said, leering. "The good Starlord said nothing about the exact method of inflicting death, so long as it was fairly merciful." He

chuckled.

Hammill, standing stiffly against the far bulkhead by Nita's slumped body, reached down and grasped her cold, limp hand. He gathered together his ever-growing mental powers. This was the time to act. Now. Without any more delay.

Nita. Nita, can you hear me?

His mind moved out, sought contact with hers as she groped toward consciousness. He sensed feelings of pain stirring in her bruised head; he detected a sense of loss, of incompleteness, of almost nakedness, coming from her as she realized she no longer had the *hsrorn*.

Nita. Nita.

DESPERATELY, he transmitted to her the image of the leering guard, standing before them pondering which way of killing them would be the most delightful.

Wake up, Nita. Wake up.

He felt her mind coming back to full activity again. *Oh, my head!* And then - - *what's going on?*

Rapidly he filled in the events up to the present moment. The entire interchange took but a micro-second.

We've got to do something.

Yes. Hold on tight, Nita's mind said. There was something else, indistinct, half-concealed, that

she had added. Was it - - *darling?*

Hammill reached toward her mind and they linked. It was not as effective nor as powerful a linkage as it would have been if focussed through the *hsrorn*, but their minds did blend to a degree of rapport.

The guard took a step forward and lifted Nita's head. "You're a pretty one," he said. She quivered imperceptibly at his rough, coarse touch. "Too pretty to kill, perhaps."

"You'd better not try that, Holmak," warned the other guard. "If Lord Kleyne comes back and finds us - -"

"You're right," Holmak admitted. He unholstered his blaster. "We'd better make it quick after all."

All right, now, Nita said. *Now! Push!*

A burst of energy sprang from their unaided minds and leaped toward the unsuspecting guards.

"We've got them!" Hammill cried exultantly. The dizzied guards tottered unsteadily under the assault of the two minds, and Hammill sprang forward, happy to be able to end his long period of motionlessness.

His fist crashed into the taller guard's chin, snapping his head backward sharply. As he fell, Hammill turned his attention to the

other, who was groping bewilderedly around the cabin.

"I'm over here," Hammill said happily. He collared the guard, slapped him a few times to clear his head, and then slammed him to the floor with a roundhouse right.

"I think that'll do it," Hammill said. He picked up the two unconscious guards, dragging each by the scruff of his neck, and hauled them to the back of the tiny scoutship. "Tie them up," he told Nita. "And get their blasters away."

He reached down, took a blaster from one of the holsters, and quickly sealed off the tube that held the ship to Kleyne's.

"We're free of the other ship," he said. "But now we've got to get out of here in a devil of a hurry. They won't be expecting us to escape, and maybe we can get out of range of that traction beam of theirs."

"How's the drive?" she asked.

"It got pretty scrambled during the recent encounter. I don't think the left field coil of the mass-time converter is going to give us enough push."

"We've got another way," Nita said. "Even without the *hsorn*. Give me your hand."

He nodded and approached her. It was the only way - - and wouldn't Kleyne be surprised

when the little scoutship suddenly took off like a startled fawn, bursting to a thousand lights immediately from a standing start!

Nita's thought came into his brain, urging, pressing. *Think of the ship moving, Laird! Faster? Faster!*

The scoutship shot off into the depths of space.

FLEET ADMIRAL Bronson, tall, lean and graying, looked bleak as he received the two fugitives in his cabin aboard the flagship *Gifford*. His battleship had been hit by two ray-blasts, and a torpedo had taken off part of the rear guide coils.

Hammill and Nita stepped into his cabin; his hand was tightly clasping hers.

The admiral's eyes were cold. "We've lost, Captain Hammill. We - -"

Hammill knew immediately what was going on within the admiral's mind. As far as the admiral was concerned, the failure of the Earth Federation Fleet was due entirely to Hammill's failure as a spy on Denerix. It was an irrational decision on the admiral's part; he had to blame someone, so he had blamed Hammill.

The defeat of the Earth Fleet had weighed heavily on the admiral's mind; though ordinarily a just

man, he had, in the past few hours, become bitter against those who had figured in the loss of the battle.

"I don't know who this woman is," he said. "I presume she is a native of one of the local planets in this galaxy. You have - -"

A thought flashed from Nita to Hammill. *Stop him!*

But Hammill's mind had reacted even more rapidly than the girl's. In a split second, he had taken control of the admiral's mind.

When the admiral finished his sentence, he said: " - - done the fleet a great service. Do you have any ideas for beating the Starlords?"

The speech was purely for the benefit of the officers who were watching. Under Hammill's Control, Fleet Admiral Bronson turned to his staff and said: "Captain Hammill knows this galaxy better than anyone else. I suggest we listen to his ideas."

Hammill felt all the bitterness of the admiral; he knew how every one of the officers felt. His mind had picked up every bit of the fear, the heroism, the panic, and the determination of these men.

And yet, he knew that, in spite of their feelings, he, Laird Hammill, must take charge.

A ripple of shock ran across the surface of Nita's mind as she real-

ized what Hammill intended to do. But it only lasted for a moment. Then she thought: "You're right, Laird; it's the only way."

"It is," he thought. "It's the only way."

Aloud, he said: "As I see it, we'll have to use guerilla tactics. We'll have reinforcements from Earth within a few days, but, until then, we must harass the enemy within their own borders. If we give them a chance to form a fleet a really *big* fleet, we won't stand a chance, ourselves."

At that instant, a deep, resonant voice sounded within Hammill's mind.

Nita and Hammill! What are your findings on the military preparations of the Starlords of Shanador?

Instantly, Nita responded.

They have some sort of screen.

Hammill had recognized the mental voice as that of the linked and assembled minds of the Council of Rhodanas. It was obvious that none of the Earth officers in the flagship's control room had heard a thing. Only Nita and himself could receive the mental communication from Rhodanas.

What sort of screen?

Rapidly, Nita explained what had happened when she had hurled a bolt of mental energy at the Shanandorian spaceships.

We see, said the Council. It hardly seems worth worrying about, but we shall check. Meanwhile, we have information for you. Observers, inform them of what you have learned.

The mental voice changed subtly, and Hammill recognized it as the voice of the Observers.

We have been able to penetrate the screen.

Hammill felt a sense of deep respect for the Rhodanan Observers. Nita had given them the characteristics of the Shanadorian thought screen, and within a small fraction of a second, they had analyzed that screen, penetrated it, and taken full account of what it had hidden.

The Starlords are preparing an invasion in force; the Observers continued. Under the enforced leadership of Lord Kleyne, they have prepared an Armada of ships to blast Earth. Unless they are stopped, the Federation will be doomed.

Quickly, Hammill fired a thought at the Observers.

Will you help us?

The answering voice was cold. *We cannot. We will give you information, but we will not give you either physical or mental aid. That is our decision, and the decision of the Council at this time.*

Very well, Hammill said bitterly. We'll do without your aid.

What information do you have?

Quickly, concisely, the Observers told them what had happened and was happening within the Galaxy of Shanador.

SO SHORT A TIME had passed during the interchange of thought that the officers of the Gifford didn't even notice the slight pause in Hammill's voice. As though there had been no interruption whatever, Hammill continued.

"I happen to know where every main base of the Shanadorian fleet is located."

"That's almost unbelievable!" said one Commander. "We have estimated that there are over three hundred thousand major bases in this star system!"

"Three hundred thousand, four hundred and eighty-one, to be exact," Hammill said coolly. "I know where they are located, which stars, which planets of those stars, and where the bases are on each planet. Earth's only hope - - and believe me when I say this - - is for us to smash those bases!"

The officers looked at each other and then looked at Admiral Bronson.

Bronson, still under the mental control of Laird Hammill, said: "What do you think, gentlemen?"

"Why can't we wait for Earth's reinforcements?" asked a Vice-Ad-

miral.

"They won't be here for three days," said the Fleet Admiral. "In that time, the Starlords' fleet can take off and hit Earth, which will be unprotected. Neither this fleet nor our reinforcing fleet could get back to Earth, set up defenses, and fight a battle in time." He glanced at each of them in turn. "We'll have to do it as Hammill says."

THIRTY - FIVE THOUSAND and eleven Terran ships - - all that remained of an armada of nearly ninety thousand starships - - fanned outward from their point of assembly, many thousand light-years from Shanador, and sprang forward for the attack.

In the flagship *Gifford*, Laird Hammill paced uneasily back and forth as he watched the glittering suns of Shanador grow closer in the viewplate. This was virtually Earth's last chance.

If the Starlords beat back this attack, crushed the remnants of Earth's armada before the reinforcements had a chance to arrive - - it would mean Lord Kleyne's unquestioned dominion over the Galaxy.

Hammill felt a deep sense of inner confidence that helped to dispel some of his fears, and knew that he was drawing on the resources of mental power itself. His

experiences with the Rhodanans, with Nita, with the actual *hsorn* itself - - they were *changing* him, bringing his latent mental skills to fruition. Laird Hammill was growing in mental power with each successive challenge.

And now forces were gathering for the final attack. He stared at the glowing viewplate, and began to plan his assault, knowing that he might be called upon to develop even further in the next few hours.

He snapped on the wide-band communicator and began to dictate orders to his ships.

"Wing 26? Wing 26? Do you read me?"

"We read you," came the voice of the radio operator aboard one of the three J-type destroyers that constituted Fighting Wing 26.

"Here are your orders: attack Starlord base on Nellerang Seven."

Quickly, he reeled off the coordinates of that planet and directed the three destroyers to the point of attack.

He watched as they peeled off from formation and swung down to Nellerang. Then he summoned another group. This would be a pinpoint job, a series of lightning swoops that would immobilize the Starlords' bases before they were aware of what was going on.

The Starlords had one great weapon in their armory - - the

hsrorn stolen from Nita. But that was a question-mark; Hammill did not know if Kleyne would dare to use the gem after seeing what it had done to the late Lord Brannis. And Earth had one great weapon on *its* side - - the sensitive, powerful mind of Laird Hammill.

Frowning in concentration, he continued the job of planning the destruction of the Starlords.

THE REPORTS began coming in shortly.

"Wing 38, Commander Hammill. Do you read us?"

"Come in, Wing 38. Over."

"We report mission accomplished. We've blasted the port on Quinbak VII and destroyed nine spaceships sitting on the field waiting to blast off."

"Good work, Wing 38. Move to Trantol IX now, and operate as follows - - "

Hammill carried the entire gigantic pattern in his mind. Nita, at his side, stared white-faced at the screen, saying nothing, simply lending the strength of her own mind to Hammill. For that moment, he was two people, and the whole was definitely greater than the sum of its parts. His mind ranged through the Shanador system, finding weak points, dispatching ships to blast them immediately.

As the reports flooded in, a sense of exultation rose within him. Earth was winning! Earth was raking the Starlord bases with deadly fury, was gutting and burning and pillaging before the Starlords could react.

The exultation immediately died at a colder realization - - there were still thousands of unharmed Starlord bases. Even the swiftest surprise attack could not possibly crush all of them at once. And soon, perhaps this very minute, the massed might of Shanador would be assembling to repulse the invader.

It happened almost instantly. A Class F light cruiser was reporting from Kradang, the moon of Den-erix, when suddenly - -

"The ship's getting warm, sir! It feels like we're burning up! And there are no enemy ships in firing range!"

"Let's have that again!" Hammill ordered. "Check it. Sure you are not under direct fire?"

"Positive - - we - - " And the signal crackled off into a trail of static.

Hammill remained frozen for just a moment. On the screen, a tiny dot of fire told him what had happened to the cruiser.

The Starlords were beginning to fight back, then. They had recovered from the surprise blow.

But there was only one weapon that could have struck down the cruiser that way - -

The *hsrorn* was in use!

Lord Kleyne was hurling beams of mental sun-force at the Terran ships!

“WHAT NOW?” Nita asked, as the reports began coming in. “*Someone* is using tremendous mental energies, that’s for certain.”

Hammill nodded. “Yeah. And they’re hiding behind that damnable thought screen, too. Your Observers might be able to pierce it, but I can’t.” He pointed at the astroplate. “There they are, squatting on Denerix like a sniper in a tree, picking off the crews of our ships as fast as they can spot them!”

It had taken him several minutes to locate the Starlord after the first few ships had failed to report. By expanding his mental perception over an ever-increasing volume of space, he had finally found the source of the energies that were killing his men. The men themselves felt as though they were being burned alive as they died, although no actual physical force was being used against them.

Hidden invulnerably behind a gigantic thought screen on Den-

erix, Lord Kleyne was using the *hsrorn* to detect and kill the Earthship crews.

Meanwhile, the physical battle was still going on. Some of the Starlords’ ships were getting into space; more and more of them poured into the skies from bases that had not yet been bombed out of existence.

In the Eighth Decant, thirty thousand light years from Denerix, a tremendous battle had been engaged; the main part of the fleet, under Fleet Admiral Bronson, was fighting a force of Starlord ships which had assembled there, presumably intending to head for Earth.

Hammill was still in contact with the Admiral’s mind; he focussed sharply on it and watched the battle through the Admiral’s eyes.

Searing bolts of energy leaped through space, splashing against the force shields of cruisers and battleships. Occasionally, those ravaging bursts of energy would cut through the force shields, and the ships would dissolve in a coruscating flash of fire.

The Earth fleet was still holding its own, but that state of affairs wouldn’t last for long if the Starlords started blasting the minds of the crews. There was only one answer to the problem: The Star-

lords had to be smashed. And the only man who could do that was Hammill himself.

Withdrawing from the Fleet Admiral's mind, Hammill turned to Nita. "I'm taking a scout ship to Denerix."

The girl nodded in agreement. It was highly probable that Hammill would die - - but he *had* to take that chance.

Minutes later, he was in a tiny, one-man spaceship, spearing through space toward Denerix. Mentally he kept watch for the huge thought screen the Starlord was using. Hammill had learned to detect the thought screen; he couldn't send or receive thoughts through it, but he could see where it was.

And, as he headed toward Denerix, it moved!

Instantly, Hammill knew what had happened. The thought screen generator was aboard a spaceship, and the ship had taken off. It was quite obviously headed toward the battle in the Eighth Decant.

Hammill shoved on acceleration, trying to catch up with it before it did any harm. If it reached the scene of the battle - -

There was only one way to beat the thought screen. He had to get inside it physically. That meant he had to invade the Starlords' spaceship personally!

Slowly, slowly, the little ship gained on the Starlord's cruiser. Hammill still could hardly believe that Lord Kleyne had managed to learn to control the *hsorn* jewel without help. Lord Brannis had tried it and died. Even Hammill himself had been aided by Nita when he had first used the gem.

But there was no doubt that the *hsorn* was being used; nothing else would account for the destruction of the minds of several hundred Earthmen.

Five hundred million miles from the fringes of the great battle that was taking place between the stars, the space cruiser of the Starlords slowed and stopped.

Hammill formed his plan in an instant. Donning his spacesuit, he set the automatic pilot of the ship to continue on in the trajectory already established, and dropped through the airlock.

He dangled in the bottomless gulf for a moment, wheeling to orientate himself. He caught sight of the Starlord's cruiser far off down in the star-jeweled distance, and narrowed his eyes as he estimated the push he'd need.

His mind groped backward until he felt Nita's thought-radiations. *Nita?*

Laird?

Stay with me, he told her. Then he pushed, propelling himself for-

ward to the Starlords' great cruiser with his mind.

HE REACHED the skin of the ship and clung there for a moment. The thought-shield was still wrapped around the vessel; inside, Lord Kleyne dealt destruction to the battered Terran fleets.

His mind thrust at the thought-shield and rebounded. The ship was tight as a nut.

Summoning all his *hsrorn*-awakened powers, Hammill shaped a thought and drove it against the thought-shield, hurling it again and again. The wave-barrier yielded, strained, finally gave. The thought broke through.

Hammill's mind made contact with that of one Dovrak Lemorn, a jetman aboard the cruiser. Hammill transmitted an image to him - - that of Lord Kleyne, ordering the jetman to open the secondary airlock.

Hammill smiled as he heard the jetman say, "At once, lord," to the empty jetroom, and move toward the lever that operated the airlock.

Hurry, Dovrak! Hammill ordered.

The airlock slid open and Hammill leaped in.

"Who are you?" the jetman asked, just before Hammill struck him down with a bolt of mental

energy. He turned and ran down the corridor. Now that he was within the thought-shield, he could detect the pulsing vibrance of the *hsrorn*, focussing the hatred of the Starlords against the Terran fleet.

It was Hammill and Nita against Kleyne plus the *hsrorn*. Hammill had no time to see if the odds were with him. He burst into the control-room - - and reeled back as a bolt from the *hsrorn* sent him staggering.

"Hammill! Inside the thought screen!"

It was Kleyne - - only Kleyne had not dared to use the *hsrorn* alone after all. He stood in the control-room with six other men in the ornamented robes of Starlords; their hands were joined in a ring. The seven of them, together, could handle the mighty voltage of the *hsrorn*, where one man - - as Brannis - - would be burned out instantly.

Hammill recovered and thrust up mental defenses. Sweat poured down his body. He wasn't sure if he could handle only Kleyne - - and now there were seven Starlords!

They turned their attention away from the battle and on Hammill. He felt the blazing power of the *hsrorn* driving him back, back, relentlessly.

Seven against one - - and they

had the *hsorn*. Feebly he repulsed their assault, batted away the impulses radiating from them, but slowly they forced him to his knees.

Hammill reeled dizzily. Somewhere in the back of his mind he heard Nita urging him on, urging him to rally and drive the Starlords back - - but he could not. Another few steps and they would reach him, and then he would be vulnerable to orthodox weapons - - such as the blaster in Kleyne's hands.

There was one defense.

He would have to create a *hsorn* of his own.

WITH PART of his mind, Hammill unleashed a blast of mental power that rocked the Starlords momentarily and gave him the instant of freedom he needed.

His mind reached out, questing toward the nearest star. He plunged into its heart, dove deep into the blazing fire - - and plucked out a flaming mass of light!

The Starlords pressed him relentlessly as he drew the light from the heart of the star, drew it toward him, compressed it, crystallized it, infused it with life and purpose and power.

"We've got him now!" he heard Kleyne cry jubilantly. The Star-

lords rushed forward, bursting through Hammill's temporarily-weakened defenses, drove in for the kill - -

Hammill looked up and saw Kleyne's hate - contorted face hovering over him.

"Sorry, Kleyne," he said almost regretfully. With a final gigantic wrench, he pulled the newly-created *hsorn* to him. It hovered in the air just above his eyes, glowing and filling the cabin with its light.

Hammill focussed his mind through it - - and hurled Kleyne and his six cohorts back against the far wall of the cabin!

The other six Starlords remained where they had fallen, knocked unconscious by the tremendous power of Hammill's mental thrust. But Lord Kleyne was on his feet in an instant with the *hsorn* grasped tightly in his hand! The practice in using it with the other Starlords had enabled Kleyne to use it by himself! Kleyne, by himself, could now control the mental energies of the *hsorn*!

With a look of hate on his thin, handsome face, the Starlord of Starlords hurled a bolt of mental force calculated to slay any living thing. Instantly, Hammill erected a mental barrier against it, and the spear of hate splashed harmlessly aside. At the same time, Hammill blasted back at Kleyne.

But Kleyne, too, warded off the blow. Mind, to mind, both powered by the tremendous forces of the *hsrorn*, the two men faced each other.

The battle between them was silent. Neither man moved. But the titanic energies unleashed between them became a roaring holocaust in the infraspaces of the mind.

No unprotected mind could withstand even a small percentage of that gigantic torrent of power. Within a few milliseconds, every crewman on the ship and the six unconscious Starlords had died, their minds burned out by the flare of silent energy from the battle in the control room.

It was a stalemate. Powered as they both were by the forces of the *hsrorn*, neither could gain an advantage over the other.

Meanwhile, the Earth Fleet, disastrously weakened by the directed mental blasts of the Starlords, was fighting a losing battle. And the reinforcements were still over two days away!

Slowly, Lord Kleyne moved his right hand. It was difficult for him to concentrate on moving his hand and to concentrate on the Earthman at the same time, but the hand moved, nonetheless.

Hammill saw what Kleyne was doing; he was reaching for the blaster at his hip. And Hammill

was unarmed!

Carefully, slowly, Hammill took a step toward the Starlord. It was difficult; in order to move his foot, he had to think about it. And if he took any attention whatever from the screen that was holding off the mental bolts of Lord Kleyne, if that screen were to weaken in the slightest - - Hammill would die. And with him would die Earth's fleet and Earth itself.

But he had to move forward. If Kleyne managed to draw the ray pistol at his side, he could kill Hammill where he stood.

And then a thought came into Hammill's mind.

Hold on, Earthman! We are coming! Hold on!

It was the voice of the Council of Rhodanas! Had they, then, changed their minds? Hammill didn't know. He took another step forward.

Lord Kleyne's hand was only inches from the butt of his pistol now.

There was only one chance for Hammill. Gathering every ounce of mental and physical strength he could muster, he hurled one tremendous bolt of mind-shattering force against the Starlord, and simultaneously launched his body across the control room in a great leap.

His shoulder slammed into the

Starlord's solar plexus, and the pain of the blow momentarily distracted Lord Kleyne's mind. Just for an instant, he dropped his screen. And in that instant, he died, his mind seared into death by the vastly greater power of Hammill's mind.

WITH THE MENTAL pressure so suddenly removed, Hammill felt his senses reel for a moment. He shook his head dizzily, trying to get the fog out of his brain. When his head cleared, he looked up at the astroplate. The Battle of the Eighth Decant was still going on.

But there was one difference. The Earth fleet was winning! Somehow, the reinforcements had arrived. Then Hammill realized what had happened. The Council must have brought them. The full power of the people of Rhodanas, backed by the unthinkable energies of the *hsorn*, had pulled Earth's reinforcement fleet to the battle in a matter of seconds.

That is correct, Hammill, said the resonant mental voice of the Council.

"Why did you change your minds?" Hammill asked telepathically.

We did not, the Council said. *We had intended to aid you from the start. But we couldn't tell you so openly. You would never have developed your present mental power if you had depended on us. You had to learn by fighting your own battles.*

"I see," Hammill said. "But why? Why did you want me to develop such powers?"

The Starlords are dead. The peoples of this galaxy have been enslaved by them for so long that they are no longer capable of governing themselves. A strong mind was needed for the job. We chose you - - and Nita. This galaxy is yours, now, Hammill; yours and Nita's. Rule it well.

And then came Nita's voice. *I'm coming, Laird Hammill!*

And, again projected by the might of the Council's mind, Nita appeared suddenly in the control room beside him.

"We've won, darling," she said as he took her in his arms.

THE END

ANNOUNCING OUR NEW FEATURE: "COSMIC PEN-CLUB"
FOR COMPLETE DETAILS READ OUR EDITORIAL ON PAGE 4



LUTHER
SCHEFFY

"Wow! That was close!"

REPORT ON THE NEWYORCON

by
Ed Wood

The 14th World Science Fiction Convention was held at the Biltmore Hptel in New York City over Labor Day. We asked Ed Wood, member of the University of Chicago Science Fiction Club to give IMAGINATIVE TALES' readers his reactions.

RARELY HAS A CONVENTION started out with the unique advantages of the Fourteenth World Science Fiction Convention-Newyorcon held over the Labor Day weekend in New York City. New York was unanimously acclaimed at Cleveland in 1955 as the convention city for 1956, held in the very center of American publishing with scores of professional editors, publishers and writers to choose from, with numerous people experienced in holding conventions and conferences; one has to regretfully announce that "They labored valiantly and brought forth a dead mouse." The convention program with the exception of a few highlights was dull, inept and feeble.

David A. Kyle the chairman tried for a "high level convention" with personalities like Herman Wouk, Aldous Huxley and other *important* people possibly on the program.

They did not appear. Nor can chairman Kyle be blamed for honest experimentation in attempting something different. However it is axiomatic that a strong, tightly organized, well thought out program be offered to interest the convention goers, many of whom are unable to visit and enjoy themselves at the after program private parties and such.

Although billed as a four day convention, only informal meetings occurred on the first day, Friday August 31st. The official program opened on the afternoon of Saturday, September 1st. As with most conventions, one heard the welcome address by the convention chairman-David Kyle, the adoption of rules, the introduction of notables present. The guest of honor-Arthur C. Clarke made a few remarks.

After a 30 minute intermission, a panel of science fiction experts assembled on stage and they answered

questions about science fiction. This panel which varied in membership throughout the convention program popped in and out at odd intervals to keep things going while the regular program was assembled. Dr. Thomas S. Gardner took the stage to explain about balloting for the achievement awards. Some were so close that a special ballot had to be called for the next day to determine the winners. L. Sprague de Camp gave a moving tribute about the late Fletcher Pratt. The next three items: speeches about "Science and Science Fiction", "Today's Fancy is Tomorrow's Fact" and "The U. S. Satellite Program" were poorly attended in spite of their inherent interest.

The first event of the evening session was an amateur movie in color titled "Longer Than You Think." Produced and presented by the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society, this abortion of the cinematic art could best be left in well-deserved obscurity with the remark that night scenes in movies are seldom photographed at night but are filmed in broad daylight through filters.

A brief talk "Science Fiction on Broadway," by Arthur Kingsley preceded the excellent science fiction ballet "Cliche" produced by Ruth Ramsey. A wonderful job by all concerned and a real highlight of the convention.

After this came something which can only be described as a descent into the Inferno. All members of the convention were invited to a "Science Fiction Cocktail Party" sponsored by a large number of professional book and magazine pub-

lishers. Imagine if you can, several hundred people milling around a small bar straining to get what obviously must have been the last drink before the onset of Prohibition!

Concluding the day's official program was the Costume Ball. Absolutely the best masquerade ever to grace a science fiction convention. The different costumes showed real imagination and enormous effort at this truly outstanding event.

Parties continued until the early morning hours.

On Sunday morning, a chartered Sightseeing Boat Trip Around Manhattan Island lured some 30 or 40 hardy souls into what was for this writer a memorable part of the convention.

Balloting for best novel, novellette, short story, book reviewer, artist and fan magazine was the first item on the agenda for Sunday afternoon. P. Schuyler Miller reported on his most recent survey on science fiction books. Edward J. (Ted) Carnell reported on book and magazine publishing in England indicating that the next six months would be a slow season for English science fiction books. Ted Sturgeon gave the address "Fiction and Science Fiction" to conclude the first afternoon session.

John W. Campbell Jr., made the major talk of the afternoon speaking at great length and with little light on "Psionics." A panel discussion immediately afterwards composed of Edward E. Smith, L. Sprague de Camp, Harry Stubbs and Campbell discussed psionics. Only de Camp showed courage in reminding Campbell of some of his

previous enthusiasm ala dianetics. Due to the lateness of the hour, the panel "Impact of Atomic Energy on Man and his Progeny" was delayed until the next day. It was in fact never held at all.

THE BANQUET THAT NIGHT will go down in science fiction history. An outrageous \$7.10 price tag, the half-cooked chicken, the insolent behavior of the waiters all combined to make true the statement that, "Never have so many paid so much for so little." After a short and not very knowledgeable speech by Al Capp, the one and only Robert Bloch really got the party going with his wit, charm and personality. *He is the best toastmaster in the business.* Isaac Asimov, Anthony Boucher & Randall Garrett aided in the speech department. Arthur C. Clarke made a powerful serious intelligent speech that lashed out with keen logic at flying crockery, colliding worlds and reincarnated Irish colleens. A marvelous performance by one of science fiction's best thinkers and authors.

After Clarke's speech there was the presentation of awards: best magazine—*Astounding Science Fiction*; best novel—*Double Star* by Robert A. Heinlein (*ASF*, Feb-April 1956); best novelette—*Exploration Team* by Murray Leinster (*ASF* March 1956); best short story—*The Star* by Arthur C. Clarke (*Infinity Science Fiction* November 1955); most promising author—Robert Silverberg; best feature writer—Willy Ley; best artist—Frank Kelly Freas; best fan magazine—*Inside*; best book reviewer—

Damon Knight who carried his just published *In Search of Wonder* under his arm as he went to the platform to receive his award.

Parties continued until late in the morning with the Nick and Noreen Falasca of Cleveland, Ohio being the best at the convention.

London received the 1957 convention by overwhelmingly defeating the Oakland-Berkeley bid during the Monday afternoon session.

Then came one of the saddest sights ever seen at a science fiction convention when David Kyle announced that the convention had lost money and was 1200 to 1400 dollars in the red. Passing the hat around and running a few quick raffles netted better than \$300 showing the generosity of the people there. Many had already left for home since it was late in the afternoon. Lester del Rey later came to the stand and also asked that past recriminations be forgotten and that all science fiction people, fan and professional alike rally around to help the convention get out of the red. While it is undeniably necessary to assist the New York committee to get out of their troubles, still can science fiction afford to continually forget the fumbling, bumbling and general ineptitude surrounding some of the World Science Fiction Conventions? Let's face it! Reputations were soiled, a general aura of incompetence regarding conventions which future conventions will have to surmount, was attained, and science fiction took a long step backwards—all because of the 14th World Science Fiction Convention.

Ninety people failed to come to

the banquet thus the committee which had promised the hotel 400 people had to make good the loss. At \$7.10 each this amounts to a goodly share of the deficit. Regardless of the committee's idealistic attempt to make sure no one would be disappointed in getting a banquet ticket, one can only say they showed an astonishing lack of business sense.

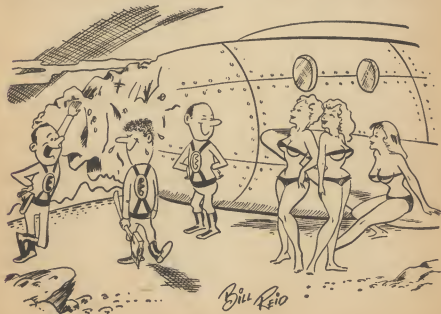
Contributing to the many difficulties of the convention committee was the outright theft of three mannikins from the Air Force display. Also a number of paintings disappeared. All this in spite of a hired guard!

A method for financing conven-

tions other than auctions must be found. Today the top artists do not sell their illustrations but only the reproduction rights. Therefore their material is not available for auction. Should the registration fee be increased to \$3.00? Surely conventions will have to have some guarantee against loss or no one will want to put them on. These statements are submitted for the cogitation of fandom.

In their failure to benefit from the experiences of past conventions, the New York executive committee succeeded in turning a dull convention into a tragic convention. Call it sad, not bad.

THE END



"Your vote clinches it, Galloway. We're stoying."

THE MENTALLER

by Mark Reinsberg

Shoganon had tasted the glory of being a Solar Champion; now he was down in defeat—yet his mental power was still useful — for murder!

EXCERPT FROM "STATUTES OF EARTH, A.D. 2903," AS AMENDED BY PANGALACTIC COUNCIL: It shall be a crime for any person possessed of telepathic, telekinetic, parapsychic or other extrasensory faculty to impinge upon the mind of any person not possessed of similar faculty. The penalty for so doing shall be death.

THE YOUNG MAN with pale white womanish hands sat at the restaurant table, fiddling disinterestedly with his food. His large wedge-shaped head with thickly coiled brown hair was bent forward as though too heavy for the slim neck and slender shoulders. The sapphire blue eyes were narrowed to thin crescents, smoldering like banked nuclear furnaces.

"There are no other Mentallers present," he said softly, barely moving his lips. "Now, thug, point out the man."

Across from him, smelling faint-

ly of Eau de Mizar, the meticulously groomed heavyweight hunched forward with elbows on the table. His voice was low and his scowl camouflaged as a smile.

"Watch your tongue, Mentaller."

The young man raised his eyelids without raising his head. "Thug, I call things by what they are."

The thug clenched his hairy, manicured fists. "Mentaller, I could break you in half." The words came quietly through gritted teeth.

The young man smiled very sadly. "Can you kill a man a hundred feet away? Without a weapon? Without a sign of violence? Can you make him fall over dead as if from heart failure while stuffing a piece of steak in your mouth?"

The thug was silent for a moment; then he regained his aplomb. "No, wise guy. We hired you to do that. Want to back out?"

The young man dropped his eye-



lids. "I asked you to point out the man."

The thug turned imperceptibly, glancing from table to table of the crowded luxury dining room. There was the rumble of human voices, the purr of one-wheeled robot waiters tilting against their gyroscopes to navigate the curving aisles. His glance halted at the vestibule; his lips compressed in a sneer.

"He's coming in now. Commissioner Praeger," he added derisively, "the man who's going to clean up the Spaceport Workers Union."

The young man stared quizzically at the dining room entrance.

"That one," said the thug. "The grey-haired guy with the young girl."

A tall, spare-figured man in his fifties exchanged words with the human maitre d'hotel, then nodded and turned to his companion, a pretty teen-ager wearing the tea-rose yellow chiton of a highschool student. They traded smiles and he patted her fondly, on the shoulder.

"See him?"

"I see him," said the young man, and a disturbed expression came over his face. "But your boss Lubach said nothing about a girl."

"Don't worry about her. She's just his daughter. They have lunch together here every week."

The young man watched Praeger

and the girl follow their waiter to a reserved booth.

"All right," said the thug, "let him have it."

The Mentaller's eyes drifted back to his table companion. A faint humorless smile edged his expression.

"Leave me, thug. I do my work alone."

The thug stood up. "My pleasure. But let me give you a little practical advice, since this is your first job. When you've knocked off the Commissioner be sure to finish up the rest of your meal before you depart. You won't attract suspicion that way. In other words, eat your peas and carrots like a good little boy and some day you may grow up to be a man."

"Get out of here," said the Mentaller softly.

"And another thing," the thug continued, smiling unpleasantly. "We don't care how it was on your planet, or how many bigshots you know on Venus. This is Argolis, and Lubach is boss here, and when Lubach pays for a job in advance he expects results. So don't come in later with any excuses. They won't do you any good. Understand?" He flipped a coin onto the table. "My share of the bill, Mentaller. We'll be waiting at union hall for your report."

GLADE SHOGANON was alone, as he had always been, as every Mentaller was in human society. He stared at the opposite side of the dining room, at the grey-haired man and the young girl. They were reading the menu and giving their orders to the waiter.

Don't think. Don't pause. Don't ponder. Strike the blow now! He recognized the old, indomitable gladiator instinct welling up within.

Restraint. That was all done now. This was not the arena. He was not being urged on by a hundred thousand screaming spectators, and a billion more from behind screens, silent to him but obscenely bloodthirsty in their tasteful, sedate living rooms.

He felt an ironic urge to tell Commissioner Praeger that he was about to be honored, that his mental coils would be burnt out by an ex-champion of the Solar System. Minor league stuff, really. But not many Earthmen had risen higher than he in Galactic competition.

He remembered his first bout with a non-human, the victory that sent him to the Vega playoffs. His opponent was a giant spiderlike creature from Antares, disgusting to look at but magnificent of mind.

They had conversed before the fight. His name was :“jq(bz-: (there was no pronounceable equi-

valent) and he was a has-been in Mentaller competition, weary and homesick for his native planet.

“Why do you keep on?” Glade had asked.

“Debts,” said the spiderman. “What else can a Mentaller do for a living but fight?”

They saluted one another in the arena. The feature event. Each Mentaller was allowed his own device of distraction. :“jq(bz-: used a blinding color wheel. Glade used an amplified piano.

“This will be a fair fight,” said the Arcturan referee. “Mentallers using physical force are automatically disqualified.”

(This was a reminder only the humans needed. Aliens never forgot.)

“When I strike the gong begin, and may the best mind win!”

Their mental whips ravelled like snakes, like tortured strands of rope. Glade caught the exquisite thought-flavor of his opponent: cool, clean, dark, patient. It was a math based on a five-valued logic and webbed space. There were winds a thousand miles an hour and gravity four times that of Earth. Days of 180 degrees C. were to be endured and nights of -30 degrees C. outlasted. He had physical strength to bend a steel girder and a life-span exceeding Methuselah. But he was tired,

and he died under the whiplash blows of the Earthman's mental energy.

The crowd sensed it. The crowd roared for the kill, a real kill (that did not often happen.) And Glade willed it, for he was fighting for a try at the Galactic title.

The flavor of Antares whisked out of his mind like stale air through a spacelock. Then the spiderman crashed to the ground like a three-story building, and the crowd cheered and cheered and cheered the conquering gladiator.

Glade Shoganon felt no exhilaration. He stood in the dusty arena overcome by revulsion, nausea. Mentaller kill Mentaller? Why?

Because they reward us so highly. Because they hate us so much. Because they cheer us. Because they're glad to see another Mentaller out of the way.

Well, why not?

Shoganon readied his blow for the grey-haired man. At the last instant he checked himself. He saw Praeger reach across the table to pat his daughter's hand. Now he was holding her wrist, gently, paternally. He was talking, imparting some fatherly wisdom.

While their bodies touched he could not kill the man without hurting the girl. Never transference. She'd absorb part of the shock.

Strike when he raises his hand!

The Mentaller waited. The man raised his hand, moved it away from her wrist on the white tablecloth.

Strike now!

Hesitation was wrong. He knew it by all his Mentaller instinct, saw in himself the dreaded Hamlet complex. But a peculiar, appealing idea had formed in the passive part of his brain. It occurred to Glade that in all his life he had never peered into the mind of a Non-Mentaller.

The legal penalty was too harsh. His training, as well, in the Mentaller Boys' camp, had been too thorough. You didn't probe your opponents' mind except for weakness. You didn't meditate; you didn't appreciate. Your aim was to annihilate.

But here he was about to kill the man. Could the crime of curiosity be any worse?

There was no barrier here, no defense, no protective shield as between Mentallers. He could see all, learn all, feel all. He plunged into the grey-haired man's mind.

No! Too deep! A mistake. He tried to back out. Help!

He caught the full flavor of another human personality in one staggering draught. He was trapped, impaled in the workings of id-ego-superego like a fly caught

in a whirlpool. Conscious and sub-conscious hit Shoganon like a boulevard with two-way traffic on both

sides. He turned and twisted like a frenzied pedestrian trying to avoid being hit.

maney I'm	unique	"My	daughter	son
in it	I		daughter	dead
far	I		please my	sandead
maney	unique I		daughter	James
nat fame	me-my		clever	Jamie
nat fame	uniqueness		daughter	deadson
nat danger	cherish		please	Praegererson
nat	will		never	war
THE UNION	perish		daughter	wardamn
nat	this life		please	war
fear	this		never	damn whore
af	lave		leave	damn
fear	my		grieve	wharedam
af enemy	wife		deceive	baredom
friends	so cald-old		me	Praegerdumb
wha	cuckaldd		daughter	dumb
paisan	bed-dead		lonely	faal
the food	unfed	dear	daughter	an old
who	sparse		only	faal
feed	stars		daughter	na
Lubach	suns		ME SOONER	fool
ta	my dead		virgin	like
the rats	son Jamie		vagrant	bucking
eat	WILL GET		vile	the
rats	waiter		chastity	pawer
kill	hurry		vibrant	Lubach
rats	bring		Venus	damn
reduce rates	faad		rod of	lewd
af	happy		my	shred
transport	hape		father	crude
kill rats	a		God	pawer
whase rates	few		Gad get	an hour
kill	mare		matherget	anly with
Argalis	waits	Sylvia,"	with child	her
kill	a few		a	on her
lave	mare		mandrake	hanar
lavelust	years		raat	glary
mathersex	mare		faat	OR LATER
hungry	life		badyguard	my
far	my	he	ta	deadson
mather	unique	was	protect	Jamie
far love	my	saying	yau	caught it
alane	unique		give you	bought it
not alane	self		advice	audit
someone is listening	watching		oh my	books

He wrenched his mind free after three eternal seconds, clambered out of the mental whirlpool like a wet dog saved from drowning. Did Praeger suspect? *God what an experience!* So that fearful clamor was the naked human mind.

Shoganon braced himself, gratefully hearing the hum and buzz of the dining room, the simple physical noises - - jumbled conversation, laughter, the clink of tableware, the purr of robots.

Strike the blow now!

Too late. A sense of new, unaccustomed pity filled the Mentaller, a feeling of anguished hopelessness. He would have to deal with Lubach. He would have to find another way to earn a living.

He knew he could no longer kill the grey-haired man.

Shoganon stood outside, blinking in the hot white light of Sirius. The star's intense rays gave his fair complexion an unnatural chalkiness. He signalled at an aircab idling overhead.

"Going somewhere, Mentaller?" The thug had been waiting by the restaurant door. His hand was buried significantly in his coat pocket.

Shoganon's eyes narrowed to slits of blue fire.

"To my hotel, thug, if it's any of your business."

"Your first stop is at the union

hall," the thug said, stepping closer.

"You're mistaken. Union hall is my second stop."

"Do you want to argue with me?" said the thug.

"Do you want to argue with me?" said the Mentaller. His mental whip hovered in the thug's medulla oblongata, ready to crack down if an impulse started towards his trigger finger.

The aircab descended to the curb. "All right," said the thug, correctly assaying his odds, "I'll drive you to your hotel first."

"You follow me," said the Mentaller, getting into the cab. "Hotel Hesiod, driver." He closed the door in the thug's face.

Argolis was a large, barren, sparsely settled planet, half again the size of Earth but miserably short of water. Its atmosphere was modified from the original carbon dioxide-monoxide blanket to a very dry but breathable oxygen-argon-krypton mixture. The lack of free nitrogen of course helped account for the barrenness of the planet. But along the fringes of the city Shoganon could see the vast hermetically sealed greenhouses that supplied fresh vegetables, and farther in the distance a small, slowly growing lake beside the Water Creation plant.

Hotel Hesiod stood on the edge

of town bordering the spaceport. It was a third-class lodging in a neighborhood that was already faintly rundown and disreputable, despite the newness of the entire colony. The Hesiod was a haven for impoverished new settlers and the rough, hard-drinking spaceworkers registering for the night with their pickups as "Mr. & Mrs."

That was what surprised Glade Shoganon about the girl. She did not fit in the surroundings. She wore little makeup but she was pretty. She was tall and stately in her bearing yet obviously less than twenty. Her dress was not revealingly tight-fitting; it was a formless draped gown without sleeves, beige-colored pinned at the waist and shoulders with golden clasps. Her black hair was drawn off-the-face to a cascade of curls. She smiled and advanced to him, her long gown slightly grazing the lobby's marble floor.

"I'm Bettina Armin," she said, extending her hand. "You are Glade Shoganon?"

He had taken her hand before he checked himself. "No, I'm sorry. You have the wrong party."

She was not disconcerted. "Yes," she said, her brown eyes twinkling, "I know you travel under another name. But you are the Solar champion Mentaller, are you not?"

Beautiful women throw themselves at champion Mentallers and Shoganon had never suffered from surfeit. But he was not, he reminded himself, any longer champion Mentaller of the Solar System. And the thug was standing just inside the hotel entrance.

"I'm sorry I can't help you," he said, turning away brusquely. She followed him to the desk clerk, but he ignored her. "Last night I gave you some money for safe-keeping," he told the clerk, handing him a receipt. "May I have it please?" The clerk nodded and went off.

The assurance in the girl's eyes was replaced now by anxiety. "Please, sir. I know who you are and I need your help desperately."

He stared at her fine young suntanned features, her bare arms, slim and well formed. "How can you be so sure?" he said, his face devoid of expression.

"Can we go some place and talk? Your room, perhaps?"

That was tempting. The clerk came back with his envelope of money which he counted. But impossible.

"Sorry, miss. I haven't time right now."

He strode to the doorway and again she followed him. He halted and gave her a look and she stopped, pleading with a gesture of her

hands and fright in her eyes.

"It's terribly important. To me."

He turned his back on her and went out the front door.

"All right, thug," he said harshly. "Take me to your union hall." The two men got into a black, armored airlimousine with his initials *S.W.U.*

Spaceports look and smell the same on any habitable planet. The ship cradles stand severe and isolated on a flat, bowl-shaped plain ten miles in diameter. Children watch the majestic stellar ships land there, but the life, the lights, the adult excitement, are all underground.

Beneath the landing plain, in a subterranean labyrinth, are the great warehouses bulging with goods from a hundred worlds, the luxury hotels catering to creatures from every corner of the galaxy, and the swank apparel and jewelry shops. Then come the commission and customs houses and the import-export offices; then the gaudy souvenir stalls and cheap taverns with walk-up brothels and smoke-filled gambling suites.

Seaport, riverport, spaceport. It has always been the same. Even to the drab, comfortless hiring hall of the Spaceport Workers Union, three stories below the ground. Shoganon passed two toughs guarding the door.

The union leader's office was bare as a gambling joint expecting a raid. There was no desk, no filing cabinet, no shelf of entry books. Lubach sat behind an ordinary metal table, a husky man with thick white head of hair and narrow rectangular forehead, signing a set of work permit cards. There were no other chairs. Two more union men loitered in a corner of the room. The thug, Shoganon was aware, stood directly behind him.

Lubach finished the cards. "I hear the Commissioner had a pleasant lunch. I hear he's back in his office working for the betterment of Argolis," Lubach added, ironically, exchanging smiles with his men. Then he looked solicitously at Shoganon. "What went wrong, Mentaller?"

Shoganon dropped the envelope on the table. "I'm returning your money."

The men sidled casually closer.

The union leader looked down with a hurt expression. "Wasn't it enough?"

"It was plenty. I've decided I don't want the job."

Lubach grimaced. "Simple as that," he said, mildly sarcastic. "You've changed your mind, so you give us back our money. Haven't you Mentallers any sense of honor?"

Shoganon stifled a laugh.

"Really now," said Lubach in a gentle, cajoling manner, the way of a man confident of his power, "don't you think you owe us a little better explanation?"

"I've decided I don't want the job," Shoganon repeated, conscious that the men were slowly closing in. Would they be foolish enough to attack?

"Just a change of mind? Nothing more?" persisted Lubach.

If they timed it well, if all struck at once, he'd be in trouble. No Mentaller could divide himself by four, strike at four minds simultaneously.

"If you want the truth," Shoganon began.

"Of course we want the truth," said Lubach, delaying his signal to attack.

"I can't do the job. I'm burnt out. Something must have happened to me in my last bout. I've lost my telekinetic powers."

The thug behind him put a heavy hand on his shoulder. "Oh now isn't that too bad?" His hairy, manicured hand smelled of Eau de Mizar.

"Shut up, thug!" snarled the Mentaller. "I'll take you on with my bare fists!"

The thug swung, but Glade knew a half-second in advance and ducked under the blow, and drove his white-knotted fist into the

man's adam's apple. The thug was hurt but not badly, for the next instant he drove a hard jab into Glade's belly, which the Mentaller only partially muffled in the spinal cord, and a hook to his cheek that was so much a reflex he was not able to deaden any of its sting.

The force of the blow drove him against Lubach's table, and the thug stepped in with fists brandished like clubs, battering aside the Mentaller's defensively raised arms. An uppercut rocked him backward across the tabletop, but before the thug could follow up, Glade's foot mashed into his face. The recoil tipped the table and Glade found himself for an instant in Lubach's lap before they both tumbled to the floor.

In that instant Shoganon lashed out mentally at the union leader, not a killing bolt, but enough to leave him stunned and semi-conscious during the fight. Then he heard the thug's bullish roar and he saw the other two men dive in to detach him from Lubach.

They dragged Shoganon to his feet and shoved him against the wall. Then all three took turns hammering the Mentaller with their fists. It was exhausting business. Two held him while the third battered away, as at a punching bag.

He had long been sagging limply when the men wearied and let

him drop to the floor.

"What should we do with him, boss?" asked the thug in a tired voice.

Lubach was sitting on the table, slowly regaining his senses. He breathed heavily. He ran his hand dazedly through his white hair, staring at the Mentaller's prone, almost lifeless figure.

"How should we get rid of him?"

The thug felt worn out from simply hitting the Mentaller. Why had that routine exertion left him so weak?

"Praeger is in on this," said Lubach unsteadily. "He's using him as a spy. Well, damn him! If he wants to get tough, we'll strike tomorrow. We'll close up every port on Argolis!"

"Starve 'em!" said one of the men. "Then they'll do business."

"But the Mentaller," repeated the thug as if obsessed. "What'll we do with him?"

A veil lifted from Lubach's eyes. "He was lying. He's still got Mentaller powers!" The union leader jumped to his feet. "Give it to him now! Before he comes to!"

The men hesitated. "Quick!" shouted Lubach. "Blast him now!"

The Mentaller stirred. The three men drew blasters from their pockets, slowly, deliberately taking aim. The thug fired the first shot. Another gun went off and he fired

a second time.

A look of surprise flashed across three faces and was extinguished as three bodies crumpled to the floor. Their own.

Stunned and speechless, Lubach saw the Mentaller get to his feet and go out the door. The empty union hall echoed with Shoganon's laughter.

Despair followed laughter. He walked slowly through the bright spaceport arcade, glittering with showcase windows, teeming with wealthy interstellar customers. Blase and indifferent to the fact, frogheaded Procyons waddled beside winged Arcturans, heptapoid Capellans rubbed shoulders with metallic Vegans.

There were at least a dozen Mentallers in the crowd, Shoganon's instinct told him, but not all were gladiators. Certainly not the metal-sheathed, lizard-like Vegans. *All* Vegans were Mentallers; theirs was a society based on telepathy. No retired Vegan gladiator ever worried about earning a living. A dozen executive jobs awaited him in Vegan industry.

But what did a human Mentaller do when he neared twenty-five and felt his powers decline? Shoganon remembered the tired, senescent Antarean he'd slain in the arena. The certainty grew that that, too,

was his only course. That he too would return to the arena, to be slain by another ambitious young Mentaller.

For now all he had left was a return ticket to the Solar System and a few credits to pay for his hotel bill.

She was waiting for him in the lobby, the girl.

There was a youthful charm and freshness about her, a bouyancy, and a determination.

"Hello there. You remember, I'm Bettina Arnim." She smiled up at him and stood in his way, a lovely suntanned girl smelling of apple blossoms.

Glade could not help smiling at her naive directness. "Well, what do you want me to do about it?"

She held onto her smile, but her deep brown eyes were anxiety-ridden. "I'm terribly sorry I was so rude before. I should have realized you were in a hurry. It's just that I need your help so urgently."

The Mentaller shrugged and started to walk around the female. She seized his arm; her grip was surprisingly strong.

"Please, Mr. Shoganon, I must speak to you."

"You have the wrong person."

"No, I haven't. My brother has three-dimensionals of you. I've watched your fights. Not the real fights, of course, but movies of you

in the arena. I saw you take the championship away from Narr Suyu. I saw you defend against Brattingham. I saw you kill the Antarean." She spoke rapidly, breathlessly. Shoganon was shaking his head.

"Don't deny it, Glade Shoganon! I know you. I cheered for you in the tryouts on Vega." She paused, adding more slowly with downcast eyes, "I even watched your defeat in the quarter-finals."

She was searching for something to assuage the wound. "You gave that Vegan one hell of a fight!" she added proudly.

Shoganon stared into her eyes. "Did you see me lose the Solar title?" Kliachko had cut him to pieces.

"No," she lied. "But that doesn't make any difference anyway." She glanced around the lobby. "Please, Mr. Shoganon. Where can we go and talk?"

Shoganon ran his eyes along the bronzed bare shoulders, the draped beige bodice with golden clasp.

"My room," he said.

It was a small nine-by-twelve cubicle with a window wall facing the spaceport. There was one chair and a bed. A mobile of Saturn hung from the ceiling. On top of the dresser stood his wing-headed championship trophy. That was all. The room had none of the ameni-

ties he'd known as a celebrity. He was suddenly ashamed of its drabness.

He motioned at the chair but she sat on the bed. "My brother is eight years old," she said, without preliminaries. "A month ago he killed his father."

A feeling of desecration came over the Mentaller. He knew the rest of that story without being told.

He was a boy of seven when it happened. He lived with his family on Venus, in the small industrial city of Besterville. Their house was on the outskirts of town, near the old abandoned ytterbium mines. Shoganon's father, a refinery plant foreman, had warned Glade never to play in the pits. He played there, of course; all the children played there. But one evening Glade was so engrossed in a game they were playing called fourth dimension that he didn't notice the older children going home for supper. Nighttime came on, and he and his playmate got lost in a network of tunnels. Later, his father found him and dragged him home by the ear and started to whip him. 'Don't do it,' his mother had pleaded; 'he's had such a terrible experience.' - - 'Now don't interfere,' his father commanded, 'I've got to teach this kid a lesson.' Suddenly, Glade wanted to kill his father. And the father, with hand upraised, to de-

liver his wrath, had fallen over dead.

Bettina Arnim studied Glade's expressionless face. "It looked like a heart attack," she continued, "but it wasn't a heart attack. Tommy killed him. I know, because sometimes when I've had to discipline Tommy, I've felt his rage beating away inside my brain. And when dad said, 'Tommy, either you go in and apologize to your sister for using that language, or else I'm going to deprive you of your gravitybike for two weeks,' Tommy said, 'You touch my bike and I'll kill you!' And my father said, 'Now I *am* going to take it away from you - - for a month instead of two weeks,' and he reached for the bike and . . . collapsed . . . died on the spot."

Her face wore a tragic expression. "Mr. Shoganon, my brother is like you. He's a Mentaller."

Shoganon was silent for a long moment, staring out a distant ship. His sapphire eyes glinted in the afternoon sun. "Have you reported this to the authorities?"

"No," she said. "If I did, they'd take Tommy away. They'd put him in a Mentaller camp."

Shoganon tried to be gentle. "Don't you think that would be the best thing? For other people as well as for Tommy? The child doesn't understand his own powers.

If you let him circulate among normal people, sooner or later he'll kill someone else. His mother, perhaps."

"My mother's in a mental hospital," said Bettina. "I'm his sole guardian now."

"Then eventually he'll kill you. Because you represent authority. You'll deny him things he wants to have. Prevent him from doing things he wants to do. He loves you, of course. But there will be moments - - many moments - - when he'll hate you. Want to kill you. And he'll succeed. That," Shoganon added softly, "is the Mental-ler tragedy."

"I know that," said the girl. "I know all that. But it needn't happen. Not with your help."

"Foolish girl!" he exploded angrily. "I can't help you. No one can help you. There's no treatment you can give your brother. There's no cure for being a Mentaller."

He was on his feet, pacing the tiny hotel room.

"You must send the kid to a Mentaller camp. They'll treat him decently. He'll be put under Mentaller trainers. They'll teach him about telekinesis, how to control his powers. They'll educate him, train him to be a gladiator."

"Shoganon," she cried, "I don't want that kind of a life for my brother. Past his prime at twenty-

five, dead by thirty. Or if not dead, a totally useless member of society, equipped for nothing!"

"Those are the facts of life for Mentallers. You can't change them."

"*You* can, Glade Shoganon!" She was on her feet, challenging, defying.

"Don't be silly," he said unhappily. "I was a champion and I haven't escaped them. What could I possibly do for your brother?"

She pushed him back against the bed and he sat down on the mattress in astonishment.

"Much!" she exclaimed, and her brown eyes sparkled like garnets. "Give him the benefit of *your* experience. Become his tutor - - his trainer. Teach him about telekinesis, just like they do in the Mentaller camps. Teach him how to control his powers. Only don't make a gladiator out of him. Conceal the fact that he's a Mentaller. Let Tommy grow up to be just a normal person."

Shoganon regarded her in cool admiration. "It's a good idea, Bettina. But it would take years. And as it happens, I've booked passage on a ship for Earth that leaves in about four hours. I'm returning to the arena."

Dismay swept her features. "No! No! You can't!" She seized his shoulders. "My brother needs you.

You'll die. No, I won't let you!"

Her body was disconcertingly close to his. There was the scent of apple blossom and the bareness of her arms.

"I advise you to leave," he said. "I have packing to do."

"No! You must give it more thought. Come to our house. Meet Tommy, then decide."

"Get out, Bettina."

"No, please, you must say yes."

"Get out!"

"We'll pay you - -"

He seized her slim, suntanned arms and pulled her down beside him, and pressed his mouth roughly on hers.

"- - fifty credits a - -" The words were buried beneath his kiss, and her arms went around his neck, tentatively at first, then tightly and passionately. She was warm and sweet and intoxicating. He caressed her through the beige drapery, and his hand fumbled at the golden clasp of her bodice. Beneath was a rounded firmness he could not resist.

"No, please!" She pushed him away and he fought to hold her in his embrace, but she was surprisingly strong. For an instant they struggled, and Shoganon thought of subduing her by telekinesis. It would be so easy . . .

Then he released her. "Get out! And don't bother me any more!"

Flushed and angry and discomposed, she knocked over his trophy and swept out of the room, her head held disdainfully high.

As Shoganon left the hotel, suitcase in hand, he had the feeling he was being followed. Just out of range of mental antenna lay danger. It was supertime, and the subterranean street leading to the spaceport was nearly empty. He heard his footsteps echo hollowly. Were they only his own or was someone pacing him from behind? He glanced back. There was someone, but a block away, and the light was poor. He hastened his walk as he passed the row of deserted customs houses and import-export offices.

Then, immediately in front of him, a figure leapt from a doorway. It was an erect, lizardlike creature with metal armor, and all the alarm bells went off in Shoganon's mind. A Mentaller of Vega!

Shoganon reeled under the first, surprise mental blow, but his defenses went up in time to block the brain-burning followup. He lashed back at his assailant with an angry flail that glanced off the Vegan's mind harmlessly. Both Mentallers poised themselves defensively.

"What is this?" the human demanded in outrage.

"A hired assignment," replied the Vegan telepathically.

"I know your employer," said Shoganon resignedly. He was weighing the odds and knew they stood heavily against him. Very few humans had ever beaten a Vegan in the arena. He himself had bested one after a ferocious fight in the playoffs, but that was a year ago when Shoganon was at his peak. And a few days later in the quarter-finals he had gone down to defeat before another Vegan.

"A fair fight?" Shoganon asked ritually.

"A fair fight," replied the Vegan, "and may the best - -"

Shoganon struck hard and desperately, hurling a bolt at the Vegan's cerebral cortex where defenses were strongest, but at the motor-equilibrium center in the cerebellum. He broke through and burned out the Vegan's sense of balance before being repelled. His opponent toppled to the ground. Dramatic to spectators, but no advantage to him psyonically, Shoganon knew. All it meant really was that the Vegan couldn't strike at him physically with its armored tail. Because it had not started out as a fair fight, and Shoganon knew it would not become one.

The Vegan retaliated with a strike at his mesencephalon, dimming his eyesight. Shoganon's head ached fiercely. He struck back at the enemy's thalami, missed, and

parried a lunge at his own third ventricle. Then the local attacks ceased and the two Mentallers closed in a battle of psychic energy.

The Vegan had won a tiny beachhead in his mind. Shoganon strained to evict the deadly thought-flavor. A swampy, pungent world, steaming beneath a hot white sun. A billion Vegans thinking and acting as one, drawing strength, drawing wisdom in a hideously complex telepathic relationship. All Vegans tubes, circuits and integers in mighty planetary computer. Submerge the individual! Death to the individual! Abandon yourself, human - - find comfort, find solace in the arms of our proud, sophisticated society.

Shoganon countered with every erg of dynamism in his nervous system, drove the Vegan out of his mind, and carried the attack to his opponent's medulla. There, on the brink, he too was halted.

It was a draw. They could push back and forth for hours, inconclusively. The two Mentallers were evenly matched.

Shoganon's attention, his whole being, was concentrated inwardly. But a female scream recalled him to the external world.

Bettina screaming: "Look out, Glade! He's got a blaster!"

Shoganon blinked his dimmed eyes and saw a husky, white-haired

man appear from the shadows, aiming a gun at pointblank range. The labor leader Lubach.

Glade disengaged a part of his mind from the Vegan and hit Lubach as hard as he could in the core of his brain. It was a burning, killing blow. Lubach sank to the pavement mindlessly, the blaster frozen in his grip.

Shoganon glimpsed the girl out of the corner of his eye, and then a landslide of mental force crashed into both cerebral hemispheres. His brief diversion of energy to fend off Lubach had fatally weakened Glade's defenses. His brain was battered now by Vegan telekinesis.

It was all over for him, Shoganon knew. Resistance was futile. Compartment after compartment of consciousness burst. The pressure was unbearable. He was trying to regroup his forces in a last defense of the brain-core, knowing it would fail, when . . .

The terrible pressure ceased. The Vegan assault fell apart.

Shoganon's mind wavered for one sickened instant in total darkness, then bounded back exultantly to light and life and unimpaired consciousness. He saw Bettina standing beside the dead labor leader. She was holding up his arm, the hand with the blaster. She hadn't been able to wrest it

free from Lubach's death-grip, so she had pointed the whole arm at the Vegan and pulled the trigger. The Vegan was dead.

Bettina ran to Shoganon and flung her arms about him. "Oh darling, are you all right? Oh darling, if I hadn't followed you when you left the hotel - -"

She sobbed on his chest, and he held her comfortingly, though he himself could barely remain on his feet. He held her and felt a trickle of new strength return to his shaken nerves, and a wonderful unfamiliar warmth in the area of his heart. They stood together for a minute in the deserted street. Then Glade regained the use of his vocal chords.

"If we can get away from here without being seen, this will look like a duel between just the two of them."

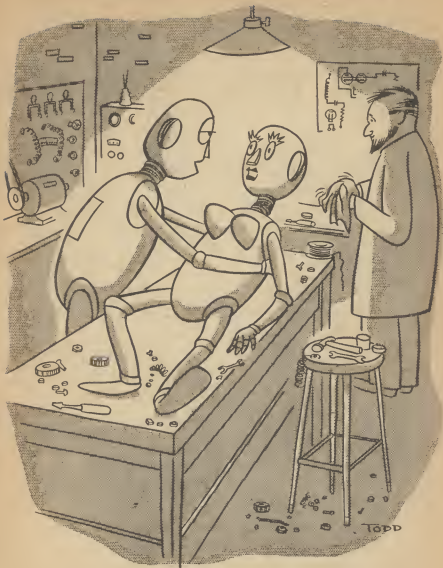
"To my house?" she asked, staring into his eyes.

They walked slowly. Shoganon was still very weak and he leaned on the girl.

"I owe you my life," he said softly. "I suppose the least I can do is go home with you and meet your kid brother."

They stopped, and gazed at one another, and then walked a little faster.

They were holding hands. They looked like a young couple in love.



"You were made for me, baby."

Medical science would say that Dave's wife was insane, that there was no hope for her. But there might be a cure, if he agreed to fight —

The Enemy Within

by

Darius John Granger

DAVE MERCER looked down at the woman on the bed more with a sense of shock and horror than with sympathy. Her arms were crossed in the sleeves of her straightjacket below her breasts; thick bands of rubber pinned her straining legs; her hair was in disarray; her lips made movements, but no sound escaped her lips. And most terrible of all, she looked at Mercer with cold, implacable hatred in her eyes.

The woman was Helen Mercer, Dave Mercer's bride of two weeks.

"Helen, baby," said Mercer, his eyes pleading, "it's me. It's Dave, Helen."

Dr. Challiphant shook his head slowly from side to side. Mercer did not know if the old Frenchman were really a doctor: he called himself that and he had been the best Mercer could find on the out-of-the-way island where he'd taken

Helen to spend their honeymoon. One week of heaven, Dave Mercer thought. Then, this.

"You have the gun?" Dr. Challiphant asked.

Dave showed him a .38 automatic. "Yes, doctor. I got it in town. But I don't see - -"

"And you truly love your wife?"

"Doctor, I'd like to arrange for passage home. In the States, with expert medical care, Helen might - -"

"Your wife is a victim of paranoia in its extreme form, Mr. Mercer. In the States all they could do is make her comfortable. There is no orthodox cure for paranoia."

"Keep away from me!" Helen suddenly screamed. "Keep away from me, Dave! Help! help me, someone! He's after me!"

Dave winced and felt sympathy flood over him like a wave. "Helen, Helen, easy now," he murmured,



trying to pat her hand through the rough cloth of the straightjacket sleeve.

"Paranoia, delusions of persecution," said Dr. Challiphant. "And, Mr. Mercer, yourself as the persecutor."

"But I - -"

"Don't talk," Dr. Challiphant said. "Listen. What do we actually

know about paranoia? What does anyone know about psychosis in general? Therapeutic psychology is not a science, I don't have to tell you that. It's no better - - but no worse - - than witchcraft. A deep psychotic, Mr. Mercer, has never been truly cured in the history of therapeutic psychology, despite all the claims you may

have heard to the contrary."

"Oh, God . . . Then Helen - -"

"I didn't say that. I didn't say she can't be cured. Consider yourself lucky, Mr. Mercer, that you chose this island. Have you paid any attention to the Islanders?"

"They seem - - unusually happy."

"They are. They are, Mr. Mercer. But oh, I tell you, they are prone to mental disturbances. However - -"

"I never saw a crazy man or anything like a crazy man here on this island."

"However, they can cure psychosis!"

"Cure? Doctor, I'll pay anything, anything."

"It will be dangerous. Sometimes, for the therapist, the cure is more dangerous than the ailment is for the patient."

"But I - -"

"You will be the therapist, Mr. Mercer. It is why I asked you to get the gun."

"I don't understand."

"You'll do anything?"

"I love my wife, doctor."

"Good. Good." Dr. Challiphant found a bottle of native wine in a cabinet and began to drink. He did not offer Dave any.

A drunken would-be doctor, Dave thought, groaning. And no other medical man in five hundred

miles of ocean

"The natives have discovered," Dr. Challiphant was saying, "and don't ask me how they have discovered it, Mr. Mercer, that a person with a diseased mind has another separate existence on another - - well, call it, plane of being."

"You mean, sort of like the sub-conscious mind you hear so much about?"

"Keep away from me!" Helen wailed. Her face was covered with sweat.

"Not precisely like the sub-conscious, although the sub-conscious may well be one manifestation of this separate plane of existence. It is, Mr. Mercer, for all intents and purposes, a private fourth dimensional world."

A quack, Dave thought. A quack who had to come half way around the world to find a people primitive enough to listen to his wild theories.

"Through hypnotism, Mr. Mercer, the natives have found a way of entering that all but unknown world. That is, I can enter your sub-conscious - - physically. You can enter mine. Or, as it specifically applies in this case - - you can enter your wife's sub-conscious mind, on the physical plane, and destroy whatever it is that is responsible for her insanity."

DAVE DID NOT answer. Anger welled up within him - - anger at himself. The native boys had assured him that Challiphant was "much doctor" and he had allowed himself to hope

"You'll do it?" Dr. Challiphant asked abruptly. "I must warn you, there is danger. For, on this separate plane of existence, in this fourth dimensional world, if you will, the mental and psychic becomes physical and corporeal. In short, whatever monsters are plaguing your wife mentally will then plague you physically and, quite possibly, destroy you."

"I told you I love my wife. But I don't see how any hare-brained - - "

"Mr. Mercer. It is childish to pass judgment until you have seen. Will you do it?"

Dave looked down at his wife. She had been lovely. She could be lovely again. And love - - how could he describe, how could he put into words, the love he felt for her? He had to admit that Dr. Challiphant was right about one thing: psychology knew of no cure for his wife's ailment. Didn't he owe it to her, and to himself, to try anything - - no matter how wild it seemed? He'd purchased the .38 at Dr. Challiphant's instructions, hadn't he? Without even wondering what it was for? It was

as if he had known all along that he would try whatever the doctor told him to try

He looked down at Helen. He wiped the sweat off her brow with the palm of his hand. She was cold. Her lips were trembling now. Her eyes stared at him, wide and hate-filled.

He turned to Dr. Challiphant and said: "All right. All right, what do I have to do?"

"Splendid! Splendid! We can begin at once, if you wish."

"At once."

"I will hypnotize you, my American friend. I will send you - - within. You are ready?" Even as he spoke, Dr. Challiphant was pulling the thick draw-drapes closed across the windows, blotting out the bright tropical sunlight. Distant happy sounds of the natives at work and play were suddenly cut off, like the light. Dave could barely see Dr. Challiphant. He heard Helen moan softly.

"I'm ready," he said.

"You realize, of course, that I cannot tell you what to expect. According to the native data, it is usually violent, usually physically dangerous. And, naturally, since your poor wife suffers from delusions of persecution, you can expect that - - in the world within - - she will be persecuted, attacked, or at the very least pursued by some-

thing which, to her, is monstrous. So. Now, Mr. Mercer, stare at the light."

A small point of light sprang into being immediately in front of Dave's face. He had to admit it was a good trick: he did not know how it was managed. He stared at it and watched it seemingly expand, expand until it filled the room with a blazing radiance painful to behold.

"The light " said Dr. Challiphant compellingly. "The light, Mr. Mercer How big how very big how huge and all-encompassing . . . the days and nights the sun and stars and all the universe . . . restfully enclosing the light compels slumber slumber light "

IT WAS DARK where Dave awoke.

Well, not precisely dark. There was no apparent source of light, but somehow he could see. *Night vision*, he thought. He knew immediately where he was. Awakening, he had not lost his presence of mind. Dr. Challiphant had hypnotized him. But now there was a difference. Now Dave believed everything Dr. Challiphant had told him.

Hypnotism? he thought. Was Dr. Challiphant making him be-

lieve? But surely the strange, darkling plain he found himself on, the gleaming black obsidian expanses, the distant upthrusting of fang-like mountains - - surely all this was real? Somehow? Somewhere?

"Helen," he said.

His voice echoed after a while, as if there were distant, unseen walls throwing the sound back at him. Were he not standing there on the obsidian plain he wouldn't have been able to tell where the initial voice had come from.

Something weighed heavily in his hand. He looked down. It was the .38 automatic and somehow he was glad to realize he still held it, as if he knew, without knowing how he knew, that he would need it.

Was it cold? he asked himself. No, not cold. Then, warm? No, not warm. There was apparently no temperature. Was there air to breathe? He seemed to be breathing, but not the faintest stirring of wind could he feel. Nor was there any sign of life in the whole vast expanse of visible darkness, except himself.

He began to walk. He took exactly five steps - - and heard a scream.

As his own voice had, it echoed. It was Helen's voice and he began to run, but even as he did so he realized he would never be able

to find her. The scream - - and the multiple echoes. Helen could be anywhere, beyond the fang-like, thrusting mountains in any direction.

She screamed again.

And then, all at once, she was running across the dark plain toward him. She did not look in his direction: she was looking behind her as she came.

He went toward her and held out his arms. "Helen," he said. "There, now, Helen."

She turned her head. Fear contorted her face and, since she could not stop her forward motion and was almost upon him, she swung her small hard fists at him.

He caught her hands easily, holding them, holding her still. She tried to kick him, but soon he held her so that she could not move.

"Helen," he said. "It's going to be all right now, Helen. I've come for you. I - - I'll take you out of here."

She looked up at him. Hatred had replaced fear in her eyes. "Out of here!" she said bitterly. "You know I can't get out of here."

"Why not? I've come for you. I'll take you."

"Why are you tormenting me like this? You're the guardian, you've told me that. Unless you're killed,

I can't escape. Ever. So you chase me and torment me and now - - this."

"No, Helen. It's me. Me, Dave."

"I know your name, damn you. At least let me go. Let me run away. Let me - -"

"Helen, look at me. I love you, Helen."

She looked up at him defiantly, but slowly the hatred in her eyes faded, to be replaced by something else, something which Dave had wanted to see for so long. "Oh, Dave, is it really you? The other you? Because the one here - -"

"Now I get it," Dave said. "There are two Dave Mercers here, is that what you're trying to tell me?"

"One, just one. And another in the real world. But you - - you've come through to me, haven't you? Haven't you, Dave?"

"Yes," he said.

"He's the guardian. He taunts me. Why don't you kill me? he says. But I can't do that. How can I do that? He looks like you. He - - he is you, physically. I want to kill him to be free. I want to - - to love him because in a way he's you. Two mutually exclusive desires, making up the sum total of this universe"

Two mutually exclusive desires, Dave thought, filling her mind until all else was blotted out. No

wonder she'd gone psychotic. Was this, then, the answer to all psychosis? Dave knew that Dr. Challiphant would say it was.

"You'll have to do it," Helen said. "I couldn't. I'll never be able to."

"Do what?"

"Kill the other Dave Mercer for me. Then I'll be free. It's the only way."

DAVE GLANCED at the gun in his hand, then studied it with a strange fascination. A weapon. A lethal weapon. To kill himself. Or, at least, an extension of himself in the physical projection of Helen's unconscious mind. Could he do it?

He had to do it

"Can you take me to him, Helen?"

"I think so." They began to walk. The terrain seemed changeless. The saw-toothed mountains never came any closer. The obsidian plain retreated behind them, and before them it advanced, maintaining the mountains at a uniform distance.

"You aren't - - well, you're not - - " he began.

"Insane? Is that what you mean? No, I'm not insane here. Here it's purely physical. Didn't Dr. Challiphant tell you?"

"Yes. But wait a minute! How

do you know Dr. Challiphant?"

"He's been treating me, hasn't he? Although my conscious mind isn't functioning, my sub-conscious is. I've known Dr. Challiphant as long as you have."

"You believe in him?"

"I believe in you. He sent you to me, Dave."

Just then a figure - - hardly more than a silhouette at first - - sprang into being between them and the mountains. It came closer and Dave got the .38 ready, pulling back the hammer.

But soon the figure became clear. Dave gaped. It wasn't the other Dave Mercer.

It was Helen, another Helen . . .

"Dave Mercer," she said, and her voice was Helen's. "You are a prisoner here. You cannot leave this place under any circumstances, unless I am slain. But can you kill me, Dave Mercer?"

"Dave, Dave!" the first Helen cried. "It's a trick. It's some kind of trick."

But it was no trick, any more than the other Dave Mercer was a trick. The second Helen approached him. The first Helen became tenuous, insubstantial. She was talking, but Dave couldn't hear the words. It was as if she had gone into limbo between the two worlds, the conscious and the sub-conscious.

"Come here to me," the second Helen said. Her lips parted invitingly. Her limbs flashed white and pink. Dave took her in his arms and held her and felt her body warm against his. Then, by sheer effort of will, he pushed her away and stood back.

"Helen! Helen!" he called. But the first Helen was hardly more than a shadow now, looking on but powerless to intervene.

"Give me the gun," the second Helen said.

Dave made no move. He felt as if he could not move if his life depended on it. But he wanted to move. He wanted to run away. Forget the Helen he had come for, forget everything and run, run, run . . .

As a mentally disturbed person runs, manifesting psychosis on the conscious level.

"Give me that gun, I said."

She crossed the little space that separated them. Dave brought up the gun slowly. "Stop," he told her.

"I'm Helen. You love me. You can't shoot me."

He gazed around wildly. He couldn't see the other Helen anywhere. "Helen?" he said. "Helen!"

"I am Helen. The gun."

He did not hand it to her. Nor did he try to keep her from taking it. He felt it plucked from his almost nerveless fingers.

"Fool!" he heard her laughter. "Weak fool!" The gun barrel crashed across his forehead and he felt the warm surging flow of blood before he felt the pain.

HIS HEAD was cushioned on Helen's thigh. Without speaking he knew it was the first Helen.

"She's gone?" he asked.

"Yes. Are you all right?"

"I think so."

"They have us both now, Dave. Oh, Dave, you shouldn't have come. They have us both and we're prisoners forever. And Dave - - she has the gun."

"Listen," Dave said, sitting up. "I can't deny their existence. I see them. Or at least I've seen her. I've touched her. But why Helen? Why are they doing this?"

"That's simple. If they keep us here on the physical level, then they're in control, in our conscious minds, in the real world."

"But they're insane there!"

"Yes, and insanity is the normal state of affairs to them."

"You mean right now in the real world I'm a paranoid just like, just like - -"

"Like I am? Yes, Dave."

"And we can't get out of here?"

"Unless we kill them. Killing them is the only way. But they're armed now, and we aren't."

Dave got up. He felt giddy and weak but his strength returned with every step he took. "Take me to them," he said.

"But Dave, I - -"

"Come on, Helen. You want to get better, don't you? We're wasting time."

"Dave, you talk like it's like - - like taking medicine or something. But we have to kill them, and we can't kill them because they're extensions of the people we love. How can I kill Dave Mercer? Any Dave Mercer? How can you kill - - an extension of me?"

"I can't," he said. "And - -" with a grim smile - - "I hope you can't. But - - there's nothing to stop each of us from having a try at his own extension. As far as we're concerned they're evil, right? They're insane and evil? Their whole reason for existence is to harm us. Wouldn't you like to kill everything that's evil in you? Couldn't you do that? Couldn't you? Wouldn't anyone do it to himself, if he could?"

New hope showed in Helen's eyes. "Yes," she said, walking faster. "Yes, I suppose so. But - -"

"But what?"

"They're ruthless, Dave. And they have your gun."

There was no answer to that, just yet. Although a thought was nibbling at the back of Dave's

consciousness, an idea which he knew was their one chance, if only he could crystalize it.

"Here," said Helen suddenly. There was no further time to think. "Right here."

A black wall of stone materialized in front of them. It reared upward for a great height and there was a small cave-entrance near its juncture with the obsidian ground.

Dave took a deep breath. He wondered if the other knew Helen and him had come. He wondered what they would do about it. They merely had to come to the cave entrance and fire the .38 twice . . .

"Come on out of there!" Dave shouted. The thought, their means of salvation, bursting to be born - -

He heard footsteps. Helen trembled alongside him. He reached out for her hand.

And then the other Helen and the other Dave, together, materialized in the cave entrance. It was Helen who held the gun.

"You fools," she said. "You walked right into it. You came here to die."

She pointed the .38 at them. The hammer clicked.

IT CAME to Dave, then. The second Helen wasn't pointing the muzzle of the .38 at him. She was pointing it in Helen's direc-

tion. Sure, he thought. It had to be that way. He couldn't kill her because she was an extension of his beloved. But, in precisely the same way, she couldn't kill him.

"Keep back of me!" he ordered the first Helen, thrusting her behind him. He began to walk forward. "Go ahead and shoot," he said. "Why don't you shoot."

The second Helen glared at him, hatred and defiance - - but something else, too - - in her eyes.

"I - - I can't!" she wailed.

"Then give me the gun, you idiot," the second Dave Mercer said. "If you can't, I can. Give me the gun."

Time seemed to hang. The second Dave Mercer - - his identical twin, but the evil, warped side of a two-headed coin. Everything in himself that he hated, here personified. How easy it would be to destroy that - - to kill it physically! It wouldn't be murder, morally or in any other way. And it certainly wouldn't be suicide. It would be exorcising of devils. It would be self-improvement

"Will you give me that damn gun!" the second Dave Mercer cried. The second Helen snapped out of her trance-like state and began to hand the weapon to her partner. It was now or never, Dave knew. For once that .38 exchanged hands, all would be over

He hurled himself at his twin.

They went down together on the rocky floor inside the cave entrance, his double cursing. Dave had a wild glimpse of the .38 clattering away over the rocks and of both Helens diving for it. Then he was fighting for his life with the second Dave Mercer.

The man was strong, as strong as he was - - naturally. Both of them were fighting for their lives. Both knew it. But one was fighting out of love and goodness and the other, out of hatred and evil.

Dave felt his head bang against the rocks. His senses reeled and for a moment an inviting pit of blackness opened before him. *Surrender*, a voice said. *Surrender to peace*

It was his own voice - - the other half of his ego. He had to fight it. He had to fight more than the physical manifestation of Dave Mercer. He had to fight the mental suggestions as well. He broke free and climbed to his feet unsteadily. The other Dave Mercer came up after him, panting. Momentarily, he saw the two Helens fighting tooth-and-nail for the possession of the gun. He could not tell them apart.

Then the second Dave Mercer got under his guard and drove a hard left fist into his midsection. He felt himself folding and felt the

choking flood of pain rising from his solar plexus to envelope him. He went down and the second Dave Mercer brought up his knee. It exploded violently against his jaw and he never recalled hitting the ground but only knew he was stretched out there, beaten

"The gun! Quick!" cried the second Dave Mercer. Dave looked up groggily and saw his double walk toward the battling girls, then wade into them and try to separate them. Fists and nails and elbows and legs flew and whirled. Dave blinked. The second Dave Mercer retreated back toward him.

With a triumphant smile on his face.

With the gun.

Dave got up. He seemed to be moving slowly, as if mired in syrup. But he must have moved with astonishing speed, for he reached his double before the gun could be fired. They collided, fists churning, pounding. The .38 clattered away and Dave heard a shrill shout as both girls made for it again.

He stood toe-to-toe with his double, slugging. Battle of good and evil, he thought vaguely, reduced to its barest physical essentials. The other Dave Mercer brought up a knee and drove it cruelly into his groin. He sagged and held on, then uppercutted his right fist and

felt the numbing impact as it struck his double's jaw. He struck again, hooking his left. But the second Dave Mercer wasn't through. He went in behind the left hook, crossing his own right and jarring Dave to the toes. Dave lowered his attack, striking for the momentarily unprotected belly. He got in two good blows with each hand before his double brought his guard down. Then Dave struck for the head again, heedless of the blows which rained on him, driving his foe back across the cave with hard lefts and rights, advancing on him, stalking

The other Dave Mercer sagged suddenly and groped on the floor with his hand. He came up brandishing a heavy stone and slammed it at Dave, catching him high on the right side of his head. Dazed, Dave started to go down. But he managed to clutch his double's clothing and bring him down, too.

The stone rose, fell. It banged against the floor an inch from Dave's face. Sparks flew. Then Dave got his fingers about his double's throat. Hands beat at him. Hands raked his face. He held on grimly and gradually got out from under, pinning his double with the weight of his body and holding his throat, his grip tightening, tightening.

Don't, a voice said. Don't do it.

You've won. You've won, so why kill him?

But he had to kill. The voice was a trick, his double projecting. Yes, he had to kill - - but it wouldn't be killing at all. It would be exorcising his own personal demon, destroying the evil and disease in himself.

HIS FINGERS closed. There was a convulsive squirming under him. Just then he heard the .38 roar once, heard a muffled scream and a body fall. He could not look to see what had happened. The hands were beating at his face, like wings. Weaker now, slowly, without strength. The eyes protruded. His eyes - - his double's eyes. Then abruptly the body went limp and Dave knew he had won.

He got up, whirling. One Helen was on the floor, a bullet wound in her breast. The other stood there, weaponless. The one on the floor was dead. But which Helen?

"Oh, Dave, Dave," the living Helen said. "We fought for the gun. We - - I didn't mean"

For the space of a heartbeat, he said nothing.

"Dave, it is you?"

"Yes, Helen. We've won, darling. We've won."

Even as he spoke, the dead Helen's body became tenuous. He went to it stiffly, awkwardly. It

was thin and gauzy now, like smoke. It drifted. It was gone. Where it had been was only the floor of the cave. And the gun.

He turned quickly to the other Dave Mercer. Already the body was insubstantial. Even as he looked it faded and vanished.

"Dave - - " Helen said. He took her in his arms.

"It's all right, baby," he said. "It's all right. Of course they'll vanish. They were real - - in a way. But their physical reality here in this inner world depended on us, because they were only extensions of us. And we've beaten them. We've beaten them."

The walls of the cave grew misty. Helen in his arms became incorporeal. He floated through vast distances

"Cured; I see," Dr. Challiphant said.

Dave stood in the little dispensary room. Helen was still strapped to the bed, but Dr. Challiphant went over and unfastened the buckles.

"But, doctor," Dave said, "if you and these islanders can use an insane person's loved one to cure his insanity, why don't you tell the world? Why don't you - - ?"

"Would they believe? Could they ever be made to believe? You saw for yourself and you believe, but

science would never accept what you have seen."

Dave knew that was true. He didn't want to argue about it, anyway. He went to Helen, who had opened her eyes.

She looked up at him. She seemed weak, but he knew she was sane. He knew she would never be any-

thing but sane again.

"Oh, Dave," she said. "I've had the most horrible nightmare."

It was no nightmare. He knew that. Somewhere, somehow, it had all happened, even as Dr. Challiphant knew it would.

But that would be the doctor's secret - - and Dave's.



Vector Analysis



THERE are many mathematical examples to choose from when one wishes to demonstrate the extreme utility of applied mathematics. None of these is more suggestive however than vector analysis.

This discipline, now commonplace among theoretical physicists and engineers is not widely enough known to persons in other aspects of engineering who could make use of it.

Vector analysis is geometrical thinking translated into vivid physical imagery. Everyone remembers from his high school algebra that a vector is a directed line segment with magnitude *and* direction, its characteristics.

The useful property of these directed line segments is their ability to represent many things in the physical world from displacements and velocities, through forces and torques to electric and magnetic fields.

This universal application of a rather simple idea, is extremely valuable. So many conceptions in physics are difficult to visualize but

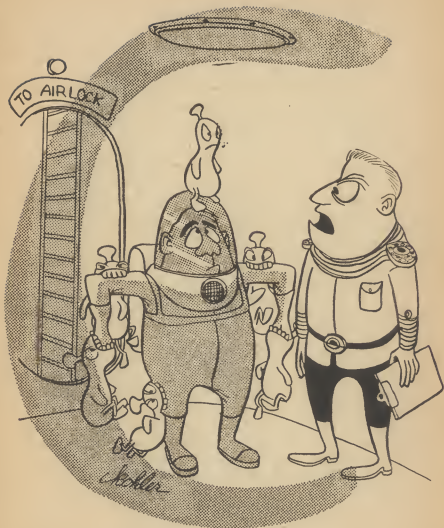
with vector analysis they become easy.

It is too bad that few engineers take the trouble to learn this language. It is as useful as the calculus and indeed has a calculus of its own not very different from the one we know.

Vector analysis makes hard ideas easy. To visualize an electromagnetic wave is impossible; to appreciate and use a directed line segment representing that wave, is a commonplace utilitarian thing.

One could cite innumerable examples from every field of applied science where vector analysis might make itself useful. It is perhaps best seen in electromagnetism. When you study the famous Maxwell equations in the vector form, not only are they simpler, but they have an unmistakable beauty and aesthetic appeal.

Physical science at best is difficult. Vector analysis is just one way of making this hard subject easy—as do most of the mathematical tools.



"Antagonizing the natives again, Harris?"

THE STAR SLAVERS

by

Randall Garrett

There was no defense against the raiders from the void because Earth had no space ships to fight with. But what you can't lick — join!

THE SLAVERS STRUCK while I was at work. While I was sitting at my desk, trying to pretend normal existence was still possible in a world quivering with fear of the extra-terrestrial invaders, they came to my home and carried away Joyce.

The first I heard of it was a bulletin from the newstape in my office. The machine clicked and a little reel of tape came flapping out.

"You get it, Lee," said George Artman nervously. He was the engineer who sat across the desk from me. "It's your turn."

I put down my slide rule, pushed back my chair, and grabbed the tape. I read it, then let it drop.

"Bad?"

"Bad," I said hoarsely. "The Slavers just made another raid. They got Montauk Point this time,

it says." I sat down heavily. "They - - got everyone who was there."

George looked at me sympathetically. "Your wife was home, wasn't she?"

I nodded. "Yeah."

"The government oughta do something," George said. "We shouldn't have to live this way, never knowing when they'll strike, who they'll take next - -"

"The government *can't* do anything. We can't fight back at all. They have spaceships; we don't. If we could only capture one of their ships, we could learn how to build it and create a counter-attacking force. But we can't, and we're helpless." I smashed my fist down hard on the drafting desk, making blueprints leap into the air. "The swine," I said, thinking of Joyce as a slave on some filthy alien world. "They pick us off like sitting ducks."



"There's nothing we can do," George said.

I glared at him. "Maybe there is," I said. "Maybe somebody can stop this thing before it goes any further." I got up and walked out.

There wasn't much sense going home. I called, just to make sure it had really happened, and when the operator told me sweetly that service to Montauk Point had been temporarily suspended I knew there was no point in making the long trip. It had really happened. The aliens had given my town the usual treatment - - grab everyone in sight and then jet-blast the houses. I didn't want to see the smouldering heap that had once been a neat little suburb, and so I didn't go home.

I wandered around town the rest of that day, feeling that I wanted to hit something real bad but the something was only a shadow. We *couldn't* fight back - - not when the aliens struck from the skies and vanished again. How can you fight a bolt of lightning?

I looked up at the row of lights around the *Times* Building, the big scarehead that said "ALIENS STRIKE AGAIN! WIPE OUT MONTAUK POINT, LONG ISLAND." It looked funny, having my town's name up there this time. I'd seen the same headlines a dozen times before, with a dif-

ferent town each time. Fond du Lac, Wisconsin; Sedalia, Missouri; Lenox, Massachusetts. They didn't care where they struck.

Now it was Montauk Point, Long Island. My home, my wife. But I wasn't going to sit back and take it. There *was* a way to fight lightning; by climbing to the clouds and challenging it on its home ground.

A WEEK PASSED, a week of living in cheap hotels and eating off the sixty bucks I'd had when I walked out of my job, a week of looking up at the skies and praying. That was all I could do - - pray. I had no way of finding the aliens. They had to come find me.

On the seventh day after they got Montauk Point, the aliens struck again, and this time they struck New York City. They hit a quiet part of Brooklyn, out near the troublesome waterfront section of Red Hook. It was a district made up of neat old private homes, of warehouses, and of flophouses - - a strange, mixed-up, typically Brooklyn community. It happened to be where I was living. I couldn't have asked for it better.

They came at noon. The first inkling we had was the bright splash of light that split open the sky, and then the clap of thunder

that roared down on us, that warm spring afternoon.

I was standing in an open window, looking out. It was a good thing the window was open, because I heard the closed window behind me shivering into knife-edged fragments, broken by the shock wave of that spaceship coming down from nowhere.

It hung above us, a hundred feet in the air, and a gleaming golden ladder dangled down. Then the aliens started coming. They were tall, powerful-looking creatures with rough, pitted green skin and fiery red eyes, clad in gem-studded armor with shining weapons strapped to their sides. They dropped down from the ship by parachute and began to hunt.

I heard screams of fear as people ran for cover. It wouldn't do any good, I knew. The aliens would march inexorably through the houses, pulling forth victims until their quota was filled. Tongues of flame would lick down from the ship afterward, bathing those who had hidden.

I tensed as I watched the aliens coming forward, up Congress Street toward my room. I made no attempt to hide, but waited there for them.

They saw me, standing in the window, and two of them came inside to get me. They smashed

down the door of my room. I felt rough hands seize my arms, sensed the revolting fishy odor of their bodies, allowed myself to be swung off my feet and carried out. I wasn't going to fight back - - no, not yet. I *wanted* them to take me. I had to get to that planet of theirs.

They dragged me out into the street and back down the block. One of them grabbed me around the chest and started hoisting me up the ladder to the ship. I looked down and saw grim-faced aliens moving silently toward the ship from the houses, each of them carrying a struggling prisoner.

We reached the top of the ladder, the hatch swung open, and the alien hurled me inside. Moments later the hatch opened again, and another man went stumbling into the ship. Behind him came two more and a girl in her twenties. Still more appeared in the next few minutes.

I looked around. The ship was big enough to hold several hundred prisoners. A small group of aliens was coming toward us from deeper inside the hold.

"There they come, the dirty sons," said the man who had come in after me. I turned. He looked like a stevedore, broad and burly with dirty overalls, a two-day beard, and a look of intense hatred

on his big-nosed face.

I saw him start for the aliens and grabbed his arm. "Easy, pal, they've got guns. They'll mow you down before you move an inch."

"I don't care. They deserve to be wiped out!"

"They will be," I said. "But not now. Don't fight back; it won't get you anywhere. We'll get even later."

"You mean that?"

"I mean I intend to fight these aliens," I said. "They got my wife last time. I don't like 'em any more than you."

He scratched his chin. "Okay, fellow. My name's Joe Cirillo."

"Lee Adams," I said.

One of the aliens stepped forward then. "You are now prisoners of the Gonadel Empire," he said in impeccable English. "I wish to point out that any attempt at rebellion will be punished with immediate execution."

I saw Joe Cirillo's muscles twitch, as if he longed to throw himself on that smug alien and turn his regal hawk nose into pulp.

As did someone else, a tall willowy boy standing further back in the mass of prisoners. He pushed his way through us, shouting curses, and leaped blindly at the alien.

He never got there. In mid-leap, a faint violet flash spurted

across the room, and suddenly the boy was no more. An unpleasant odor drifted up. The alien overlord looked around.

"Are there any other troublemakers?"

He stared coldly at us. Finally he turned and gabbled something to the other aliens behind him, then returned his attention to us.

"We will now blast off from your planet and return to Gonadel. Remove your clothes and follow instructions explicitly."

No one moved. Apparently that was expected, for the aliens began to mingle in the crowd, stripping us and carrying us off into the depths of the ship. It figured that they would strip us. People without clothing don't have the fighting spark; your human dignity vanishes, and with it your spunk.

I watched as they ripped away the clothing of half a dozen people near us, scowled as I saw the lovely body of the girl near us exposed to view and pictured Joyce having to undergo the same humiliation.

"Get your clothes off, Joe. Don't wait for them to make you. It's inevitable, anyway."

"Yeah," he said, and started pulling off his shirt.

WE WERE CHAINED side-by-side in a filthy, dank cabin

below, along with about fifty others, men, women, boys, girls. The aliens hadn't taken anyone much over forty or much under fifteen, which meant that they'd probably put us to manual labor on their planet.

I bided my time, there in that stinking hold. I knew I couldn't accomplish anything by getting myself killed aboard the ship. So I lay doggo, doing what I was told and eating what they gave me, waiting to arrive at Gonadel.

Joe Cirillo didn't like my tactics much. He couldn't think ahead. All he wanted to do was to smash, to rise up and strike the aliens, and it was hard to make him realize that we wouldn't get anywhere fighting back now.

"I can't help it, Lee. I see those birds marching up and down the aisles smirking like that and I want to kill them."

"You'll get your chance, Joe. Be patient."

They gave us unspeakable slop to eat, and they kept us penned naked in the hold, manacled by handcuffs of some strange bluish metal. Every now and then, one of our captors would come by to see how we were getting along. They enjoyed sneering at us and laughing at our filth and squalor and nakedness.

Things came to a head on the

fourth day out. Joe was getting harder and harder to restrain, and when one of the alien soldiers came down to the hold to pay us a visit Joe broke loose.

The alien paused at the girl in front of us, the girl who once had been pretty but now was as dirty and as unkempt as the rest of us.

"You're a nice one," the alien said. "Stand up, my lovely."

The girl glared at him sullenly without moving.

"Stand up," I said. He slapped her and she got up. The alien studied the girl with a practiced eye, pushing her untidy hair aside to examine her face, looking at her breasts and her hips and her long, handsome legs.

"I've had enough," Joe muttered. He struggled to his feet and raised his manacled arms high above his head, as if to crash them down on the skull of the unsuspecting alien.

I couldn't let him do it. I would need Joe's powerful arms later - - and to attack now would be suicide. "Hold it, Joe!" I snapped.

"Huh?"

He paused momentarily and I lashed out with my foot. I caught him in the side, rocking him off-balance. His anger shifted from the alien to me, and he turned, bringing his arms down on me. I felt a crushing impact as his hand-

cuffs cracked against my collarbone. Almost blinded with pain, I lowered my head and butted. Joe reeled backward.

Then strong, rough-skinned hands pulled us apart. I looked up to see the hold suddenly full of armed aliens, including the commander. They separated us and held us apart.

"There is to be no fighting down here," the commander said coldly. "You are sentenced to eight ray-lashes each, and any repetition of this incident will be punished with death." He gestured to two of his men, who shoved us over to a bulkhead and pressed us up against the cold, rivet-studded metal.

They proceeded to ray-lash our naked backs. I glanced around just once to see what they were doing. One of the aliens held a small box about the size of a camera, and was pushing a stud at its side. Every time he depressed that stud, a bright green ray of light flashed out and shot toward us.

It felt like hot needles under the toenails and sandpaper on the eyeballs all at once, but somehow we managed to keep standing for all eight lashes. I was bathed in sweat before it was over.

They led us back to our bench and threw us down. A few moments passed and then Joe glanced over at me. "What you do that

for, Lee? Why'd you bash me? I was just about to give that thing a headful of handcuffs and you - -"

"Keep your voice down. They don't know you were about to attack one of them or they'd have burned you down where you stood. We got off light this way, and be thankful for it." I squirmed around to face him. "Look, Joe, when we get where we're going I'll let you kill all the aliens you want. But *not now!* Not now, Joe!"

He nodded, grunted, and turned away to rub his aching back. I did the same. I knew his slow mind had trouble grasping anything so complicated as tomorrow, but I hoped he'd keep himself under control long enough for us to get to Gonadel alive.

Somehow, he managed to keep his fierce hatred penned up. The trip took eleven days altogether - - I know, not because we had any division into night and day, but because we were fed thirty-three times. Our ship landed on the planet of Gonadel so smoothly that we did not know we had landed at all until guards came to order us outside.

Legs unused to walking carried me out into the blinding sunlight of Gonadel. I stood outside the ship, blinking and trying to readjust to the light of a sun after eleven days of dungeon blackness.

Something cold and metallic prodded me in the back.

"Get moving Earthman."

I started to walk.

There had been at least a hundred of us taken in the raid that got me, and we plodded miserably over the dark-brown soil of Gona-del.

THE SLAVE-CAMP was an immense enclosure ringed by barbed wire fences, in the midst of a vast treeless plain. Off in the distance, I could see a great raw gash in the ground; a mine of some sort, probably, where we would work.

In the center of the camp was a tall building which was undoubtedly the alien headquarters, and fanning out from that were smaller barracks-like buildings. They marched us toward one of these.

"This is where you live," an alien told us. "Tomorrow you start work in the mines."

We entered the barracks. It was one huge room, filled with miserable heaps of straw a few feet from each other. There were men and women lying on the straw - - Earthmen like ourselves, resting after their day's labor in the mines. They were naked, bone-tired, utterly defeated-looking people. They had given up instead of fighting back.

I glanced around, hoping for some sight of Joyce, but I didn't see anyone who could be her. I threw myself down on an unoccupied strawheap and tried to rest. I would need my strength for what would follow.

I slept uneasily, turning and moaning. The straw dug into my skin, left me scratching and cursing. Finally morning came, and a gong sounded loudly.

I sat up and saw the other slaves straggling to their feet, beginning a weary march out into the yard. They walked like zombies, shuffling their feet and shambling along silently. I got in line and followed them out. Beside me, Joe Cirillo clenched and unclenched his massive fists.

In the yard a couple of aliens were dispensing bowls of some vile-looking stew - - breakfast. I accepted my bowl, nearly gagged, but forced the stuff down. Joe spat out his first mouthful and gestured as if to hurl the bowl to the ground.

"Better eat it, Joe. There won't be anything else, and you'll need your strength later."

He looked unhappy, but swallowed the evil-smelling stew to the last drop, and flung the bowl contemptuously into the basket provided.

Then we joined the long line of

slaves heading to the mines. It was another unending slow trek of the kind I was getting used to. After about twenty minutes, we reached the edge of the open pit and began to descend.

At the floor of the pit, aliens with drawn guns handed us picks and shovels. I stiffened as the pick was handed to me, and imagined its dirt-encrusted point sinking into a green-skinned throat. The image formed itself vividly in my mind, and I found myself quivering with the desire for revenge.

Soon, soon, I promised myself. First find Joyce . . .

"All new prisoners over here!" a loud voice called. I turned and walked in the direction of the alien who had spoken.

Quickly he explained our duties. This was a diamond mine; we were to search for them. He ordered us to make no attempt at concealment in the event of a find, but to bring the rough gem immediately to the central receiving station at the heart of the mine.

I had to chuckle at that. "No attempt at concealment," eh? Just where did he expect naked slaves to hide anything, anyway? In their hip pockets?

We set to work, digging down into the hard-packed brown soil, turning up shovelfuls, fumbling through the dirt for anything that

might gleam the right way. There was a daily quota to fill, and we would have to work until the quota was reached. I saw people working with frantic fury, hoping to beat the quota and have a few extra hours of rest that night.

"What happens if we don't make the quota by nightfall?" I asked the man next to me, a tall, skeleton-thin man of middle age who might have been a college professor once.

"We don't eat the next morning," he said. "They penalize us a meal if we don't hit the quota. Theoretically we can go home early if we hit the quota of diamonds in, say, two hours - - but that never happens. They have it arranged so we're never through before nightfall."

"Damned clever." I brought my pick down on a particularly stubborn clod of dirt, then bent and felt for diamonds. Nothing. The man at my side was doing the same thing.

I glanced at him. "Tell me, friend - - do you know a woman here named Joyce Adams? She's my wife. I'm trying to find her."

"None of us have any names here, Mister." He went back to his shovel and thrust it into the ground. "What she look like?"

"She's about five-four, brown hair, good looking, wears her hair

in bangs. Twenty-four."

He thought for a moment. "Don't know. There's a lot of women here, Mister. How long has she been here?"

"About two weeks," I said.

He turned and smiled pityingly at me. "If she's been working in the mines two weeks, friend, she isn't good looking any more."

WE HIT THE QUOTA just as the fiery sun was starting to drop behind the horizon. The news travelled like chain lightning through the mine, and we knocked off work immediately, dragged our tools back to the shed where they were kept, and returned to the barracks.

I was dead tired. I could see now how this could break your spirit, turn you into a mindless digging machine without the drive to revolt, and I knew I would have to get my plan moving quickly before the slavery wore me out too.

Two more days dragged by in the mine. There was no sign of Joyce. On the third day in the pit, I had worked into a deep gully, flailing away with my shovel with desperate vigor, and after a half hour of hard digging I spied something gleaming in the side of the gully.

I reached for it - - and as I bent a pair of dirt-encrusted claws

snatched suddenly for the gem from behind me. Without looking, I struck upward, knocking the would-be thief to one side. I turned, ready to defend myself, but to my amazement I saw I had hit a woman. She was sobbing, a small nude heap on the ground a few feet away.

"I'm sorry," I said. "But you shouldn't have grabbed like that. What did you think you'd gain by it?"

I stared at her. Her nude body was streaked with filth that seemed embedded beneath her skin; her muscles had hardened, and what had probably once been lovely curved legs were now corded and ugly. She had her face buried in her hands.

"I didn't mean - - that is - - if I had the stone, I'd have to bring it back to the desk. I could stop digging for a few minutes!"

"Is that all?" I took the stone and pressed it into her work-roughened hand. "Here - - you carry it up, then, if you need a rest. I'm not tired yet."

"Thank you," she said. She turned her face upward in gratitude. "*Lee!*"

I stared unbelievably at her - - at the swollen, distorted face behind which my wife's loveliness still shone, but dimly. "Joyce!" Delicately, I lifted her to her feet

and folded her in my arms, trying to remember her as she had looked once.

I felt a cold rifle-mouth in my back. "Very touching," said a harsh alien voice. "Suppose you get back to work now, both of you."

"Yes, *sir*." I handed my diamond to Joyce and watched her struggle up the side of the pit to the receiving station. Then she returned, and we mined together until quota-time. We walked back to the barracks together.

That night, I began planning the revolt.

I knew it could be done. All that was needed was one strong man whose spirit was uncrushed, who had come here with the single purpose of destroying the Slavers. And that man was me. I had prayed to be taken, I had spent sleepless nights waiting for my prayers to be answered. At last, they had been. I was here, on Gonadel, filled with a single-minded determination that the others lacked. Now I had Joyce, the time had come to strike.

I moved around the barracks, awakening certain people - - those whom I had observed previously, the ones I had marked as my leaders. Joe Cirillo was one; the man I had worked next to the first day in the mines was another. A third was a broad-shouldered boy

named Ed Gerton, a college senior who had spoken in favor of revolt, one evening. I tiptoed silently over the sleeping ones, picking the men I needed.

We gathered in a dark corner and plotted our strategy in whispers through the night. Dawn was breaking by the time we finished - - and when we came out for morning stew, it was with a new expression of determination on our faces.

Our plan was almost ridiculously simple - - the strategy of desperation. We made the trek to the mine with springy stride and buoyant hearts. Joe Cirillo marched at my left, his homely face bright with battle-lust, and Joyce, at my right, had lost some of the expression of hopeless defeat that clouded her face. We reached the mine at last. Word of our plan had filtered through the barracks, had been whispered over bowls of breakfast gruel, had travelled electrically down the long line of marching Earthmen.

As we spread out for our morning labor, I saw anxious faces turning toward me, waiting for the signal. I gestured imperceptibly with my hands, telling them to be patient.

We dug busily for almost an hour, while the guards moved among us, making sure that none

of us slacked off. I kept careful eyes on the spacing of the guards, waiting for the right moment.

The sun was climbing toward noon height before I was satisfied. I glanced over at Joe Cirillo, and nodded.

The signal-cry burst from a hundred throats: "*Now!*"

THERE WERE at least three thousand Earthmen in the pit, I had calculated - - and no more than a hundred Gonadel guards. The guards were armed and we were naked, but a thirty-to-one ratio would be enough if we could isolate the guards, form little rings of Earthmen around each one. That was what we had been maneuvering toward all morning.

As I gave the signal, I saw men and women all around rush forward, pick or shovel high, each with a single goal - - the nearest Gonadel guard. The aliens were caught by surprise.

I moved forward swiftly myself and caught my man with the flat of my shovel. He whirled in surprise and began to lower his rifle, but then Joe Cirillo's pick flashed through the air and thudded into the alien's chest. He crumpled to the ground. I bent and seized the alien's rifle while a vindictive-looking woman rushed up to the battered guard and

brought her shovel down on his skull.

"One down," I said. Joe, at my side, only grinned happily and looked around for the next.

On an overhanging ledge, another Gonadelian was holding off a pack of Earthmen with his rifle, firing as fast as he could press the trigger while we closed in around him. Our men were dropping - - but we had figured in a high casualty rate.

I lifted my rifle to my shoulder, sighted along the barrel, squeezed the firing stud. A purple beam squirted through the air and the alien dropped. I saw a tall young Earthman instantly snatch up his rifle, and smiled to myself. Incredibly, we were winning.

All over the mine pit, shovels flailed, picks fell with devastating impact. Green bodies lay sprawled everywhere - - and each Gonadelian corpse meant another all-important rifle in our hands.

"We're going to make it," I heard Joyce cry.

"Of course we are!" I slashed with my rifle-butt, caught a Gonadelian making a wild charge, rammed him in the throat and knocked him sprawling. "Get him, Joe!"

Cirillo picked the Gonadelian up and dashed him against the ground. A shovel hung in the air for a mo-

ment, then descended, and the alien was still.

"Thanks, Joe." I looked around, saw our men firing their rifles at the aliens. "Save your ammunition!" I roared.

The cry resounded through the mine. "Save your ammunition!" We were fighting as a team, an immense, multi-bodied unit. We were driving the Gonadelians back.

Pressing forward, we reached the lip of the mine. By now we had more than sixty rifles in our possession, and the few Gonadelians left had drawn back beyond a ridge in the distance and were entrenched there, firing into our midst.

The time had come to put into action the second part of our plan. I called to Joe Cirillo.

"What is it, Lee?"

"Give me ten good men and I'll make a break for the spaceport. We can't wait much longer, and things seem to be in hand here."

He nodded, whistled for the ten nearest men with rifles, and a few minutes later I was surrounded by an eager, determined little army.

I said to Joyce, "You stay here. We'll be back soon."

She looked at me unhappily, but nodded. I waved to my ten men, and we struck out over the back edge of the mine across the plain,

leaving Joe Cirillo and his companions to wipe out the remaining few Gonadelians in the mine.

We covered the distance between the mine and the spaceport in record time, running swiftly and quietly. Coming up behind the port, we paused for a moment.

"There's a slave ship," I said, pointing to one of the familiar-looking spaceships. "Come on!"

We raced into the spaceport, ignoring the blazing concrete pavement that seared the soles of our bare feet, and formed a tight, compact wedge that moved forward as one man. No one seemed to see us as we crossed the hundred yards that separated us from the slave ship.

We scaled the catwalk and poured into the ship.

"Earthmen!" said a startled Gonadelian.

I felled him with my rifle-butt and we dashed through the winding corridors toward the control-cabin, where a Gonadelian in fancy uniform was busy over some charts.

I stepped in. "All set to leave for Earth?" I asked.

"Just about," he said without turning his head. "The orbit is virtually complete. We can blast off immediately."

"Fine." I jammed the rifle into his back and he went pale under his green skin. "Let's blast off im-

mediately, then. Only I want you to make a little stop first - - at the mines."

THE GOLDEN LADDER dangled down over the open pit, and I scrambled to the ground, leaving three men aboard the ship to guard the all-important astrogator.

"We've got the ship," I told Joe Cirillo.

"Good," he grunted. "We've got the mine too. I have the place ringed with armed men. Should we start loading?"

I nodded. "Get all the dead weight - - the women and the wounded - - into it. Keep all the fighters here."

The loading was accomplished smoothly. A hundred eighty-six women and wounded men climbed the golden ladder, until one of my men signalled down from above that the ship could hold no more.

"Blast off, then!"

The ship rose and spiralled up into the cloudless sky, taking with it our cripples, our weaklings, everyone who might hinder us in the final phase of the attack. A moment later, it was gone, on its way back to Earth.

The battle wasn't won yet - - but we were on our way. "Back to the spaceport!" I yelled. "We've got to get the rest of the ships!"

We slashed our way through the spaceport, killing and wounding, accumulating weapons. The Gonadelians tried to stage a defense, but by that time we outnumbered *them*, and the battle was brief. The spaceport was ours.

By nightfall, thirteen ships had departed for Earth, each manned by a Gonadelian astrogator operating at gunpoint and loaded to the rafters with Earthmen. I stood in the half-shadows, Joyce at my side, watching the last few weary stragglers climbing the ladder to the fourteenth ship. Far in the distance, the lights of a Gonadelian city glittered brilliantly.

"They'll be surprised to find out what happened," I said. "Maybe they won't believe it that three thousand naked Earthmen whipped them and stole their slave fleet!"

"I hardly believe it myself," Joyce said, as we climbed into the ship and slammed the hatch closed. "But the nightmare's over. We're free again."

"Yes. It's all over." I kissed her tenderly.

I WAS wrong.

When I returned to Earth, I was summoned to the United Nations to tell my story. I did - - and was asked to help to build Earth's first space navy. I accepted.

We got our next view of Gonadel

two years later, as we stood in the forward hold of the Terran Starship *Invulnerable*, Flagship of the First Terran Space Fleet. I was wearing the blue-and-gold uniform of the newly-created Space

Service. Behind me, a golden chain of spaceships stretched out across the sky - - the massed might of Earth, which was about to destroy Gonadel and rid the galaxy of the Star Slavers forever.

THE END

★ *World's Greatest Invention* ★

WHEN the world's greatest invention is brought up as a topical essay, a thousand and one answers are given. Language, fire, printing, farming, atomic energy—partisans can be found for all these. Yet there is one invention which, in its way, probably is more important than any of these things. That invention is—money!

Money, the foundation of the economic system is a mysterious entity in much of its behavior. Often we think we know what it is and just as often we think we do not.

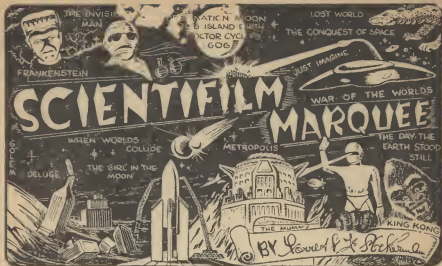
Whatever primitive stable civilization, settled upon coconut shells or pretty rocks, or ossified woods, as desirable objects without direct utilitarian value, made a gigantic step forward for the realization of a practical world, because until there is an agreed medium of exchange such as beads or coins or dollars, it is impossible to exchange goods with any degree of fairness. For automatically the market determines (for the most part) the value of objects or economic goods.

Anthropologists have never found social organizations, even among the most primitive of peoples, which did not have some recognizable standard by which to compare that mysterious quality 'value.' One wife is worth twenty cattle, or two spears can be got for fifty fish. This kind of exchange indicates a mental money and where the number are few, it probably is satisfactory, but when larger numbers of people must deal with each other some objective standard, mutually agreeable must be found. It does not matter that this standard in itself must be valuable like pearls or fine shells, or worthless intrinsically like rocks—the fact is that the standard is there for all to use agreeably.

And of course it is the exchange of goods and services that makes possible a growing civilization progressing all the while. Undoubtedly when other life is met in this universe, well - developed monetary economies will certainly be found also!



"Better holler again — I don't think anyone heard you."



IN MEMORIAM: *Bela Lugosi*
Dracula is dead.

Requiem for the Generation of Vampires.

Black Mass.

A thousand stakes thru his heart could not keep him from resurrecting nightly, but at last the Grim Reaper has had his way.

On 18 Aug. '56, Bela Lugosi, age 73, born in Lugos, Hungary, not far from the legendary Transylvania, lay for the last time in the coffin from which he would rise no more. Scant weeks before my old friend and I had been photographed and televised together two blocks away on Hollywood Blvd. at the opening of his last film, *The Black Sleep*. Now the true, the final black sleep had come to Bela. A tired, ill, suffering, disintegrating, grateful-for-friends old actor was gone.

He lay in state as Count Dracula complete with cape and medallion. Among the hundreds who passed by his casket to pay their last respects were Zoltan Korda, Tor Johnson, Richard Sheffield (his youthful acolyte and sincere friend), Manly P. Hall, Mike Spencer, Don Grollman, and Bela Lugosi, Jr. All saw that he looked magnificent in death.

In death?

But Bela Lugosi will never really die.

Thru the miracles of motion pictures and television, as long as there are those who enjoy the frisson of horror, the fun or fear of fantasy, the shock and thrill of science, there will be revivals of the pictures in which he starred. Starting with *DRACULA*, others were:

MARK OF THE VAMPIRE . . .

CHANDU, THE MAGICIAN . . .
THE BLACK CAT . . . THE
DEVIL BAT . . . SON OF FRAN-
KENSTEIN . . . THE RAVEN . . .
MURDER IN THE RUE MOR-
GUE . . . WHITE ZOMBIE . . .
THE INVISIBLE RAY . . . and
dozens more

Hail, but not farewell, Bela Lu-
gosi.

* * *

It is my sad duty, too, to report that another friend of this column has passed away, MILTON LUBAN, author of the book "The Spirit Was Willing", who died of a heart attack in August at the untimely age of 47. His original screen treatment collaboration with Ken Crossen, "Barrier to the Stars", will continue to be shown to potential motion picture producers with hopes of posthumous production. My friend Luban's last job had been as publicist on the hit flying saucer film, *Mystery of the UFO*.

Otherwise, despite the unfortunate deaths in Hollywood, the Scintifilm Center is more active than ever.

Jack Williamson is scripting *Mysterious Universe* for Ed Spiegel.

Charles Beaumont is on Allied Artists' payroll for *Queen of the Universe*, which may be an original or which may utilize Ray Cummings' "War-Nymphs of Venus" as a springboard or background.

Gilbert Frye has turned in *Queen of 2000* to Wm. Alland, and same producer is also looking at Thad Swift's "The Boy Who Saved the Earth".

Old 'Earth-Saver' Ed Hamilton

expects his "Pygmy Island" to be an entry in the microScope (that's the opposite of cinemaScope) parade begun by Dick Matheson's *Incredible Shrinking Man*. Dick, incidentally, would appear to have a whole new career carved out for himself, diminishing people at Universal-International Studios, his latest chore being the story-line for the sequel, *The Fantastic Little Girl*. And already plans are laid for the micro man and girl to grow to the size of a couple of King Kongs in a third in the series!

Not to be out-sized in the rush to gigantism, RKO is studying filmic possibilities of H. G. Wells' "Food of the Gods".

And sci-fi artists Paul Blaisdell will build and be the towering two-mile Nth Man (first created in the mind of the late Homer Eon Flint) for American International Pictures.

MGM, 20th-Fox or any of the majors are overlooking a bet if they don't get an option pronto on Ray Cummings' classic GIRL IN THE GOLDEN ATOM series and THE GIANT WORLD.

Roger Corman, excited over the dramatic motion picture possibilities of the *Bluebook*-book-television hit, THE POWER, phoned me at midnite just before planing off to Hawaii to direct an underwater scientifilm, making an outright cash offer for the Robinson property. Frank does not live in Hollywood but as it happens in the same town in which IMAGINATIVE TALES is published, so I forwarded him the offer. There's a yarn that'd

be a powerful box-office magnet!

JODY McCARTER'S plagiarism suit against Allied Artists over *World Without End* which seemed to bear too unhappily a close resemblance in certain aspects to McCarter's "Expedition Void", was settled out of court for a satisfactory sum. Jody telephoned me that she's now a couple of happy girls - - she being the collaborative penname of Jodi de Melikoff and Ver Mille McCarter, a pair of living Hollywood dolls if I ever saw one . . . and I saw one or two (thousand). Now all Allied has to worry about is about 10 other suits against the same picture, including, I understand, the estate of the late (and none more great) H. G. Wells.

Ned-the-"Mann" Who Could Work Miracles (he shook down New York in the filmization of S. Fowler Wright's DELUGE, masterminded all the miniatures and trick photography of THINGS TO COME) has got together with TFMacLaughlin on an original screen treatment they call *The 11th Hour*.

The 27th Day, Dutton novel by English author John Mantley, is underway at Columbia; and all the way from Australia a mysterious rumor reaches me of a scientifilm secretly in production in my own bailiwick, something at MGM purportedly starring Robert Taylor and called *The 35th of* (some month or other, I misplaced my notation on which).

Caught the previews of *It Conquered the World*, *The She-Creature* and *The Search for Bridey*

Murphy, the latter the least liked of the lot. Unless you entertain reincarnations or are hipped on hypnotism, the hundred minutes spent searching for *Bridey* are pretty sleepy-drowsy stuff. From what I hear, *I've Lived Before* doesn't fare much better. Billy Wilders entry into the Murphy-Mesmer sleepstakes is called *Spell of the Hypnotist*.

Clarence Greene & Russell Rouse (of *UFO*) have an untitled horror yarn on tap . . . Karloff returns in a role turned down by Peter Lorre in *Voodoo Island*. In competition, ARC will offer *Voodoo Man* . . . There's a televisual possibility of Ingrid Bergman doing a re-do of the classic *Cat People*, which originally starred Simone Simon . . . Paul Blaisdell has completed dual roles in *The Undead* . . . Sam Katzman's got some Zombies up his cinematic sleeve.

National television treat promised for 39 weeks starting mid-October: watch your papers and TV guides for a series titled MYSTERIOUS ISLAND, cinemadaptations of works of Jules Verne produced in Australia and New Zealand at a reported cost of \$1,270,000.

A Science Fiction Book Club selection, "Snow Fury" by Richard Holden, is to be filmed by Canyon Films for United Artists release. Novel is about the world threatened with extinction when the weather goes wild. Also available as a Perma-book pocketbook.

From the Memo Pad of my Flying Desk: Thanks, Chet Geier of Chicago, for the clipping from the

New York Times announcing that Arch Oboler, who produced Henry Kuttner's *Twonky*, will launch a spaceship play in Washington in November with landing expected on Broadway in December. Titled *Night of the Auk*, Times describes it as "a drama dealing with the troubles that beset the first spaceship to be launched from earth to the moon" . . . Thanks, DeValon Scott, for the phone call about your script, *Crustaceans from Space* . . . Thank you, Ray Bradbury, for the good news about the potent prospects for your own personal teleseries, even if it necessitated your turning down the *Journey to the Center of the Earth* . . . Great news, Paul Nathan, that John Wyndham's Ballantine book "Out of the Deep" will be filmed by Philip Waxman Productions for UA . . . Danke schoen, Alex Gordon, for the inside story on *Monster from the Ice* . . . Ta for the gen, Charlie Beaumont, on the monster-from-the-desert's-depths they're hatching (all 400 feet of it) over at Roach Studios . . . No kidding, Jim Nicholson? We'll be seeing *The Cocoon* soon? . . . And honourable gratitude - - however you say that in Japanese - - to you, Tetsu Yano, for dope (not opium) about the new color spectacle of the thing from Oriental Space.

- - Forrest J. Ackerman

SCIENTIFILM MARQUEE is a regular feature. Columnist Ackerman may be contacted via the Beverly Hills, Calif., telephone exchange by interested contributors.

THE END





He had only one leg, and she was blind;
yet somehow they had to convince the men from
space they merited a chance for life on the—

Last Ship Out

by

Robert Moore Williams

THE PLANET TWISTED and groaned as it turned, making nightmare noises in the places where darkness was upon it and spewing out huge columns of foul black smoke in the daylight areas.

The ship lay beside a lava flow at the edge of the mountains. Once a city had existed on these fertile plains before the lava had flowed over the town, blotting it out. Now all that could be seen of the city were the twisted steel ribs of what had once been a skyscraper rising above the thickened lava.

Leaning on his crutch, Tim Kilgro shaded his eyes against the rays of the sun. Beside him, the girl was motionless, staring as though her blind eyes could still somehow carry messages to the mind behind the brain.

"It's a ship all right," Tim said. "You were right when you said

you heard it land last night."

"Good!" The hope in her voice caught at his heart strings and pulled them so tight that he seemed to be tied in knots inside. "How far away is it?"

"Beyond the lava," he answered grimly.

"Oh," she said. The hope that had sprung into existence in her voice seemed to fade away until only the thinnest echo of it remained. "Can - - can we make it that far?"

"We never have before," Kilgro said. "But we will now." He spoke with a sureness that he was far from feeling. He did not add that they had to make the trip across the lava to the ship, that their store of food was down to the last case of canned goods - - and that case was tainted.

"Perhaps we could signal to them and they would come for us,"

she said, her voice bright with the hope of a new idea. "If we could find a piece of broken mirror, we could use it to flash the sun's rays at them."

"That's a good idea, Thelma," he said. He did not want to attempt to cross that lava flow with only one leg and he did not want her to try to follow when she could not see. Kilgro went eagerly to hunt for a mirror.

This was their island, and their universe, in the center of a lava flow that covered what had once been an American city. He knew every foot of every floor of this skyscraper. A mirror in what had once been a washroom yielded what he wanted. He clumped fiercely on his crutch as high as he could go in the building. Thelma followed him easily up the wrecked, broken stairways. The bomb blast that had brought on the volcano that had caused the lava flow had destroyed her sight, but after that had gone, her hearing had improved. As long as she could hear his footsteps she was able to follow close behind him with only an occasional stumble.

From this height, the ship was clearly visible in the rays of the morning sun. It lay very quietly in the green prairie. Tim wondered where its home base was, perhaps the moon, perhaps Venus, possibly

Mars. He hoped it was the latter. All his life he had dreamed of going to the Red Planet. Could a man with one leg and a woman who could not see start life over again on Mars?

The thought filled him with a kind of wild hope. He quickly began working with the mirror.

An hour later, he laid the piece of glass aside. "It's no use, Thelma. Either they're not looking in this direction or the beam doesn't carry that far."

"Then we will go to them," she said firmly.

The lava looked as if it had come from hell, as crumpled and as broken as if the devil himself had cursed it with all the fury of his hate and expelled it from his domain. Never before had either dared venture more than a short distance from their island skyscraper. Thelma kept as close behind him as circumstances permitted, but the going was tortuously slow. Through the dangerous places, where a fall might result in a shattered bone, he had to tell her how to move her feet and from time to time he had to place her hands on the sides of the upended chunks of black stone. At times, she crawled behind him. At other times both crawled.

He saw blood begin to appear behind her, so that she left a red

trail from torn knees. At the sight of this, Kilgro felt the knife pain in his chest again, but she did not complain. The thought of the ship and of a chance to escape from this nightmare hell and to begin life anew on some world up in the sky lured them like a rainbow seen at the world's end.

The man said, "Get to hell back to your holes!"

HE WAS STANDING on an upended stone directly in front of them. Clad in a gray plastic garment that covered his body like a glove, only his face was uncovered. This was smeared with a gray paste designed to give short-term protection from any radiation that might remain here in the lava. He held a stubby weapon with a short barrel in his hands. The muzzle covered Kilgro.

Thelma uttered a thin wailing cry.

Kilgro leaned on his crutch. "We - - ah - - that is - - we saw your ship."

The man nodded. "We figured that somebody was holed up in the old building."

"You saw our mirror?"

"Sure. And we thought that somebody would come crawling out of there sooner or later. Barr, the captain, told me to come out here and head you off and send you

back to your den." This man liked his task. His relish for it sounded in his voice.

"But - - "

"Git!" the man said.

"I - - we - - "

"We're not taking any grave dodgers back to Mars with us."

"But we're starving. We're out of food."

"If we started picking up passengers, we'd be starving too."

"Look," Kilgro protested. "Thelma — she can't see." He nodded at the blind girl standing behind him.

"Some of 'em back that way - - " the man nodded toward the northwest. "Couldn't see either. They had no eyes. They couldn't walk. They had no legs. But they all had empty stomachs and they all could eat."

"Please!" Desperation sounded in Kilgro's voice.

"My best advice to you is to go on and die," the man said. "Get it over with as billions of others have. It's really easy, once you make up your mind to it."

"You can't do this to us!" Kilgro shouted. "It's not human."

"Being human, which means being soft, went out of style the way you mean it long ago." the fellow answered.

Involuntarily, Kilgro took a step forward.

"Do you want me to help you take my advice?" the man asked, lifting the gun.

"Don't shoot!" Kilgro said hastily. "We'll go back." He began to turn by balancing with one hand against the upended slab of lava. When the muzzle of the weapon was lowered, Kilgro threw his crutch.

It struck the gun and knocked it from the ship man's hand. The weapon went *pow* softly as it clattered on the rocks. The fellow was reaching for it when Kilgro threw his body. Even with only one leg to push him, he was able to reach the top of the slab of stone on which the ship man was standing and to grab his legs. Pulling hard, Kilgro yanked the man off the top of the rock. The fellow fell on top of him and both went down together.

The man yelled once before Kilgro got his hands around the throat with the gray paste on it. Kilgro had tremendous strength in his hands. There were no more yells but the fellow clawed like a wildcat, digging with his fingers at Kilgro's eyes. The gray paste was slippery. Twisting, the ship man eeled out of Kilgro's grip. Tim tried to get to his feet. As old habit patterns came into operation, he reached for a foothold with a leg that no longer existed, and fell back heavily.

The ship man leaped at him and got his hands around Tim's throat. Tim fought for breath. Unfamiliar stars exploded before his eyes. He got hold of the fellow's hands and tugged at them with all his strength. His grip slipped futilely away.

Crunch!

The man from the ship collapsed on top of Kilgro, trembled there, twisted and shook there. Kilgro shoved him aside. The girl's face was above him. She held a heavy chunk of stone in both hands and her blind eyes were seeking for a target if a second blow was necessary. She lifted the stone as Tim moved.

"You got him, Thelma," Kilgro said. He pulled himself straight. Climbing to the top of the rock where the fellow had been standing, he found his crutch - - and the gun.

Thelma had lost her courage. "He wasn't going to hurt us, if we went away. Now he'll kill us if he gets the chance."

"I wasn't planning on going away," Kilgro said.

"No? Then what?"

"We're going to Mars."

As if sight had suddenly returned to them, her blind eyes gleamed with light. The glow faded. "But how, Tim? You heard what he said. He wasn't bluffing. The

others on the ship will feel the same way."

"I'm not bluffing either," Kilgro said. "We're going to Mars." Easing himself to one knee, he stripped the suit from the man. "Get your dress off," he said to the girl.

"But they'll know I'm not a man!"

"They won't know what you are in that uniform. We'll rub some of the gray paste off his face and smear it on you. Seeing the uniform and the paste, they'll think you're one of them."

Her face brightened again. "I might get inside the ship that way, but what about you?"

"You'll make me walk ahead of you, at gun point, as a captive."

"No, Tim. You take me."

"Thelma, use sense. Even if I put on the uniform, my leg would be a dead give-away. They'd spot me in a second."

"But how will I know where I'm going?"

"You'll make me walk ahead of you. That way you will be able to hear me well enough to follow."

"Tim! I'd die of fear."

"You'll die here, of starvation, if you stay. We both will. Maybe all we have is a choice of where we die, but when I turn my body in, I'm going to be on my way to Mars."

THE SHIP LAY on a grassy plain beside a river that tumbled down from the mountains. The main lock was open. Men in gray suits with gray paste smeared on their faces had set up a distillation plant on the bank of the stream, for removal of any radioactive poisons that the water might have accumulated on its journey down the mountains. "They're getting ready to take off," Kilgro thought. "Otherwise they would not be loading water." Simultaneously he felt a glow of hope and a pang of despair. So far as he and Thelma were concerned, this was the last ship out.

The men at the water purifier left off their work to stare at them.

"Hey, Esser, what have you got there?" one called.

"Don't answer them. They would know your voice is not right. Just motion with the gun," Kilgro whispered.

Glancing over his shoulder, he saw Thelma shake her head at the question and make a stabbing motion with the gun toward the ship.

"What are you taking him to the captain for?"

"The damned fool thinks I know where to find the bank's vault under the lava," Kilgore shouted.

"Oh!" They understood this. They were looters, raiders of the home world, pirates digging among

the blackened bones of buried cities for whatever they could find. Wealth in any transportable form interested them.

Keeping one arm high and stumping fiercely along on his crutch, Kilgro moved toward the ship. Occasionally he looked over his shoulder and yelled, "Don't shoot! I'm moving as fast as I can." He entered the lock without challenge.

The captain would probably be forward in the control room in the nose, he thought. He climbed these, then turned to his right along a narrow corridor that had handholds on both sides. Looking back, he saw that Thelma was right behind him. She was walking with a sure steady step, her head was high, and she held the gun without a tremor.

Kilgro opened the door that led into the control room. A man in a misshapen cap that carried a crumpled insignia looked up from behind the chart stand.

Even if the cap was battered and greasy, there was no doubting this man's rank and his right to it. He was big. More than that, he was sure of himself and of his own authority. He glanced at Kilgro, then looked over the latter's shoulder to see who was following him. He caught a glimpse of one of his own uniforms, which seemed

to reassure him. Then he took a second look and his sureness vanished. He got slowly to his feet.

"Well, I'm damned!" the captain said. He looked a third time. "And a woman at that!"

Kilgro took the gun from Thelma's fingers. Off to the left was a rack where similar weapons were clipped to the wall. Ahead was the steering and control equipment. To the right was the chart stand where Barr was now standing.

"And blind too!" Barr said, looking again at Thelma. "Taken by a blind woman and a one-legged man, and in the control room of my own ship." The captain was not angry. He was amazed. While he was fully aware of the gun that Kilgro held, he chose to ignore it. "And wearing one of my uniforms! What happened to Esser?"

"His head got bumped on a rock," Kilgro explained.

"Um." Barr pursed his lips. "I see. Well, what do you want?"

"A ride to Mars."

"That's interesting. Do you have any way to pay for your transportation?"

"We don't have anything except the clothes on our backs."

"That makes it a little difficult, don't you think?"

"We have one other thing," Kilgro said. "This." He patted the gun.

The captain looked at the weapon. "Well, I have to admit that does make a difference, for the time being, at least."

"You'll take us then?" Thelma's voice was a taut whisper in the still control room.

"Oh, sure," the captain said. "One way or another, we'll take you." He grinned at his own joke. Kilgro was not deceived. "How much difference would a dead captain make?" he asked.

Barr stopped grinning. "Quite a lot," he said. "But remember, I have a crew. They don't like me very much, but they obey me, because they know their own necks depend on it. Not a one of them has the technical skill to plot a course for this ship. No captain, no Mars." He shrugged as if to indicate that this matter was finished.

"A couple of people, could live a long time in this ship," Kilgro said.

"Yes, they could," Barr agreed. "We're well stocked with food. Water is another matter. Our tanks are dry. Besides, there is an engineer and a couple of his helpers working on the drive. They're inside the ship too, if you're thinking of shooting me and closing the lock and using the vessel as a fort. The boys outside couldn't get in, of course, but my engineer is already

in. He's a mighty hard man to kill. Not to mention the two men who are with him."

"You have an agile mind," Tim said.

"Thanks," Barr said, with no expression on his face. "Running a bunch like this, if you didn't have an agile mind, you'd find your throat cut some morning when you didn't wake up."

"We don't want any trouble," Thelma said.

"You're not causing any," Barr answered.

A PAIR OF NAKED ARMS came over Kilgro's shoulder and grabbed his right arm, forcing it and the weapon it held, down. Esser, with a bump the size of an egg on his head and anger that was wild hate in his eyes, came with the arms. The ship man was as naked as they had left him on the lava flow. The gun went *pow* as it was forced down. The pellet struck the deck and exploded there, digging a hole through the thick plastic covering and exposing and brightening the steel that lay below. Wild fragments of metal rattled from the walls.

Barr ducked hastily, then moved quickly forward. He measured the distance to Kilgro's jaw with his eye, then changed his mind about using his fist. Instead he used a

foot, kicking Tim's crutch out from under him.

Kilgro, with Esser on top of him, went down.

Consciousness faded to the dim sound of Thelma screaming. It came back to the sound of hot profanity. Something thumped heavily against his ribs, with pain following the thump. He opened his eyes enough to see that it was Esser who was doing the swearing. Esser was also kicking him in the ribs. Looking unconcerned, Barr was leaning against the chart stand. Thelma, her head buried in her hands, was sitting down. Her body was creaking with sobs.

"So you let a one-legged man and a blind woman take you?" Barr said to Esser.

"They got lucky," Esser answered angrily.

"Yeah?" Barr said, doubtfully. "That's not the way I see it. I ought to take them with me, and leave you here. They've got more guts than you."

Even through what remained of the gray paste, Esser's face could be seen to lose color. "You would not do that, Barr!" A whine appeared in his voice.

"You know what it's like up there." The captain jerked a thumb toward some invisible planet in the sky. "They have no room up there for quitters or underdogs

or losers - - Better look at your man again."

Kilgro had gotten clumsily to his one foot. He stood leaning against the wall. Pain was deep in him. He ignored it.

"Oh," Esser said, advancing. He kicked swiftly.

Again Kilgro hit the deck as his leg was kicked out from under him. Esser stood over him, glowering, then turned as the captain spoke.

"You did that real well," Barr said.

"I learned it from a master," Esser answered.

"Meaning me? I did it better."

Again Kilgro got clumsily to his feet, farther along the left hand wall. He grunted and Esser heard the sound.

"Oh, so you won't stay down?" Esser said.

"You go to hell," Kilgro answered.

Again Esser kicked. And again Kilgro went down, falling to his left. This time as he fell, he snatched a weapon from the wall clips. In his previous falls he had moved closer and closer to these weapons. Now he had one in his hands. As he hit the deck, he spun his body into a sitting position, and thumbed off the safety on the gun.

"You're both dead men if you move a muscle!"

Esser did not move. Except for a slight nod, as if he was satisfied somewhere inside, Barr stood very still.

"Okay," Barr said, nodding again. "You've got what you wanted - - free passage to Mars."

"For two?"

"Yes, for two."

"How do we know he will do what he says?" Thelma said.

"My word on it," the captain answered.

"Your word and *this*," Kilgro spoke, patting the gun. "It's going to be at your back all the way to the Red Planet."

"Oh?" Barr said. "Well, all right, if that's the way you want it, but that's not the reason I'm taking you."

"No?" Kilgro said, in a control room that was utterly quiet except for the labored breathing of Esser and himself.

"No," Barr said. "I could have loaded this ship to the stern holds if I had wanted to. Every place I stopped, they came to me by the dozens, whining, begging, pleading, giving every possible reason why I should take them with me, offering me everything they had for a trip to Mars. They pleaded their sores, their boils, and their starvation. They begged me on their knees, claiming that only death waited for them here." Barr's voice

went into silence as he thought again of what he had seen.

"Well?" Kilgro said.

"I didn't take a one of them, because they didn't know what they were asking me to do. What point is there in changing one corner of hell for another?" Again he jerked his thumb toward some invisible planet in the sky. "Mars is a tough world, maybe twice as tough as Earth is even now. It is no place for quitters or for losers. It needs men with guts, with all the courage that any human ever had, men who fight and keep on fighting and never quit trying no matter what the odds against them. And that is why I'm taking you - - because you had the guts to come fighting into my ship and to keep on fighting when everything was against you." The walls of the control room echoed his words.

"Yeah?" Kilgro said. "Words are cheap, captain. The reason you are taking us - - the only real reason - - is here." Again he patted the gun.

"Is it?" Barr answered. "Look at it. It's empty."

Kilgro stared from startled eyes at the weapon he held. As Barr had said, the magazine was empty.

"You earned your ticket to Mars out there on that lava flow," Barr said. "You earned it by staying alive in that hell that you called

home - - Esser, if you touch him again, I'll kill you! He has earned his chance and he's going to get it."

HOURS LATER, when the ship took off, a man and a woman stood in the control room watching the stars brighten in the sky. Neither looked backward at the

world they were leaving.

"That's it," Barr said, pointing to a red dot in the sky. "That's Mars."

They nodded in unison. He stood as if he did not know he had only one leg and she watched the heavens as if she did not know that she was blind.

THE END



Neptunian Satellite



IT comes as a considerable shock to everyone in the astronomical world to learn that the Solar System is minus a planet! Pluto the Planet has vanished, and in its stead there is only the trans-Neptunian satellite, Pluto . . .

Astronomers have been suspicious of Pluto for a long time. Not only is it indecently remote from the Solar System proper, (so far remote, that some questioned its existence as other than a comet) but the eccentricity of its orbit is most un-planet-like. Charitably however, it has been regarded as a separate planet.

On a thorough revision of the data of the Plutonian orbit, the question arose about its genuineness as a planet. It is so small, and everything about it is so irregular, astronomers have felt that something was amiss. These reviews confirmed that, Celestial mechanical examinations have shown that Pluto apparently is a satellite of

Neptune, albeit a weird one.

In fact, its relation to the mother planet is so odd, and so many other gravitational influences activate it, that even satellite may be too optimistic a word!

This re-classification of Pluto of course does not change anything fundamentally. It is still as fascinating a subject for astronomical analysis.

In particular scientists are endeavoring to ascertain the nature of its surface, the physical size of the planet, along with its accurate period.

New radio techniques, along with optical amplifiers are helping.

Probably very little more will be learned about the trans-Neptunian satellite until the rocket men put us on Lunar satellite where astronomical instruments can show their power. Until then, Pluto will have to content itself with being just one more mystic phase of the Solar System mysterious.

★

In five years they will replace the vacuum tube in television (they are doing it now in radio), and

No one could have foreseen this development. In a very short time, electronics as we think of it today, will be radically changed. There is no limit to solid-state physics!



"Hey, look! I got him to sit up!"

Wednesday Morning Sermon

by

Alexander Blade

They had no real reason for entering the church, except that they heard a voice calling from a pulpit. Being curious, they listened . . .

A COLD, BONE-CHILLING wind blew down from the north, bringing with it rain and sleet. Outside the vaulted stone arch of the church entrance, two men stood, listening to the sounds coming from within. At first, they had heard the sonorous, rolling music of a great organ, but that had ceased, and now they could dimly hear the voice of someone speaking behind the great doors.

The older of the two men turned his head slightly and cocked an ear toward the door. He glanced at his companion. "There's a sermon going on in there," he said.

The younger man shrugged. "So? That's all we need — sermons."

"Let's go in," the older man urged. "It's a way of passing the

time. Besides, it may be warm in there." He drew his tattered, rain-soaked cloak more closely about him and started up the broad stone steps that led toward the door of the church. His companion shook his head in resignation and followed him on in.

They stood together in the wide vestibule, listening to the booming words from the pulpit echo from the vaulted walls.

"Sam, let's get out of here," whispered the younger man. "This isn't for us."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the other. "We've got nothing better to do, anyway. Let's go in."

They pushed open the great carved door that led to the pews, walked quietly in, and sat down in the first empty pew they found. They listened.

THE PULPIT was quite a distance away, and they had to squint through the gloom to see the face of the brightly-robed figure who stood there, waving his arms.

"My friends," the speaker was saying, "we *must* have peace! War is an abomination; war threatens the security of our existence; war is a Juggernaut that will destroy our homes, our families, and our nations unless we take steps to prevent it!"

"I'll buy that," murmured the younger of the two men in the back. There was a touch of sarcasm in his voice.

"Quiet, Mac," said the older. "Let's listen to what he has to say."

The figure on the pulpit leaned forward and gestured out toward the row of pews. "Peace for the world - - for all mankind - - is in your hands, my friends. When the polls open tomorrow, when it is time to cast your votes - - will you vote for peace? Or will you vote for war?"

"A year ago the men from space came to Earth, offering to us the wonders of their civilization, the riches of a technology many thousands of years in advance of our own. They wanted to include us in their Federation of Worlds, to make us brothers in the community



of the Universe.

"But they said we were not ready. They told us that we must, of our own efforts, unite behind a single World Government."

The preacher's voice grew sad. "We had our chance to belong to the Interstellar Federation and we have failed that chance thus far because we, in the pettiness of our minds, can not agree. They say to us: 'Come with us, walk with us.' And we laugh at them and continue making guns.

"Now we stand on the brink of the mightiest of wars because our pride — our pitiful human pride, threatens to set loose energies and forces that can wipe us out altogether.

"You can vote for peace tomorrow — peace, by suppressing your pride, peace at the negligible cost of a little backing-down your self-centered principles. Or you can remain stiff-necked in false pride, refuse to honor the decisions made by our leaders, and plunge this world into a nightmare of war."

In the back of the church, the young man stirred uneasily in his seat. "What's he talking about, Sam?"

Sam shrugged. "It beats me, Mac."

The preacher continued with his exhortation. "Tomorrow is your chance to bring about the World

Government we all have so long desired — or you can cling to your nationalistic pride and widen the gulf between nations — the gulf that will inevitably widen into war, bringing flaming destruction.

"Do you think that a World Government enforced by arms and born of hatred and fear would be the kind of government the Interstellar Federation would want? Would they allow such a government to join them as brother? I think not.

"So even if this war did not completely wreck our civilization, we would lose our place in the community of the Universe. We would be shunned as madmen and fools, worthy only of being destroyed."

The preacher raised his hands high above his head. "Destruction is waiting — but it is in your power to stem the tide, to take the step that will end the menace of warfare forever. Vote for forming the World Government — and save your own lives, my friends!"

THERE WAS A RINGING silence in the church. At the back, Mac turned to his older companion. "I don't get it. What he's talking about is ancient history. He's talking to us as if this was the day before the War started. What goes?"

"I don't think he knows the

War's been here, Mac," Sam said quietly.

The other thought for a moment. "You mean he's stuck — giving the same sermon over and over again, day in and day out? Yeah, I see it. I get it, now."

Sam nodded. "The thing's busted, Mac. Those preacher-robots are delicate bits of machinery. When the bombs came down, it must have gotten ruined by the radiation. It thinks every day is Sunday, and is still preaching the same old song — ten years too late. What day *is* it, Mac?"

"Wednesday, I think," the younger man said. "I ain't sure. Besides, what difference does it make?"

"Yeah," Sam said, shrugging. "What difference does it make? We've had our chance."

The robot in the pulpit took no notice of them. It finished what it had to say and glided noiselessly down the center aisle of the ruined church, stepping over pieces of shattered masonry as though they did not exist.

"I wonder how badly wrecked it is," whispered Mac.

"I'll find out," Sam returned quietly.

The robot passed the burnt and blackened rows of seats, approaching the two tattered derelicts that its radiation-blasted eyes could not

see.

"A fine sermon, sir," Sam said in a low conversational voice. "I hope it has some effect."

The robot stopped. "I hope so, too. Will you be here next Sunday?"

"Of course," Sam said.

"Have a good week, then," the synthetic preacher said, moving off toward the rear of the church. "And remember to *pray*. It's our only hope for peace."

"Yeah," said Sam. "Sure."

WHEN THE TWO MEN stepped outside, the rain had ceased. It was still cold, but a brisk wind was rapidly clearing the sky.

The older man was walking down the broad steps, looking thoughtfully and unseeingly at the toes of his tattered boots.

Suddenly, Mac grasped his shoulder. "Look!"

Sam lifted his eyes, following the younger man's pointing finger.

High above them, floating serenely in the sunlight, was the great, golden ovoid of an Interstellar Federation spaceship.

"Do you think they'll give us another chance?" Mac asked hoarsely, after they stood for a moment in silence.

Sam's voice was quiet. "God only knows," he said softly.

The Nudes Of Quendar · III

by

Robert Silverberg

It was a puzzling problem for the Base Commander: men disappearing with pretty girls on an alien planet where there were no women!

BASE COMMANDER Larsen read the report the first time without believing a word of it. He read it a second time, and shook his head. "Shades of Homer! Beautiful women tempting men off into the hills! It's fantastic, Miller. You don't really expect me to swallow it, do you?"

Sub-Commander Miller spread his hands. "That's Sergeant Verner's story, sir. And he was the only survivor, so we have nothing else to go on."

Larsen clamped his lips together angrily. "I'd hate to be in Verner's shoes if he's handing us a line." He scowled. "Send me Psych Officer Phelps, will you, Miller?"

The Sub-Commander saluted and returned a few minutes later with the base psychiatrist. He was a small wiry man with a sharp nose

and, at the moment, an expression of utter disbelief.

"What's this, Commander?" he demanded as he entered. "One of the men crack up?"

"I don't know, Dr. Phelps," Larsen said gravely. "I'd like you to have a look at him right away."

Phelps nodded. "I heard part of the story. Can you fill me in before I see him?"

"Here's all we know," Larsen said. "When we sent the regular patrol relief to Quendar III, we found the base deserted -except for Sergeant Verner. He had broken both his legs during an exploring patrol, it seems, and couldn't move. According to him, the other six men saw beautiful nude women strolling outside the base dome and beckoning to them. They all walked out and never came back. Verner says he would have gone, too,



except that he couldn't move."

The psychiatrist frowned. "An interesting case of mass psychosis, obviously." His eyes lit with professional curiosity. "I'd like to see the sergeant immediately, if that's possible."

"Fine," Larsen said. "Maybe you can make some sense out of this foolishness. Imagine, seeing nude women like that!" He laughed raucously.

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An hour later, Phelps returned, his face contorted sheepishly. He glanced uneasily at Commander Larsen before speaking.

"The man's not insane," Dr. Phelps said.

"What? You don't mean to tell me that - -"

"No, Commander. I don't know if there are lovely undraped damsels running around on Quendor III. It seems improbable. I would say that some powerful hypnotic influence has been used on his mind - - with the result that he saw naked women, whether they were there or not."

Now it was Larsen's turn to look uneasy. "You mean there's some alien entity preying on our men?"

Phelps nodded. "It looks very much that way, sir."

Sub-Commander Miller, who had been deep in thought, suddenly snapped his fingers. "How about

the Mimics?"

"Mimics?" Phelps echoed.

"Yes; they're a semi-intelligent race that live on Pol IV. They hide from their enemies by hypnotizing whatever is looking for them into thinking that they look like a tree or a rock."

"I remember reading about them," Phelps said. "You think this may be the same thing?"

"Possibly," said Miller.

Larsen frowned worriedly. "Telepathic hypnosis, eh? I wonder what they'd want with the men? And why didn't they bother them for six months?"

"Six months?" Phelps repeated quizzically.

"That base has been operating on Quendar III for six months, and these Sirens have just now got around to baiting their traps."

"That's easily explained," said Phelps. "If they were going to tempt men, get them to come out of the dome, they had to figure out what men wanted - - men who'd been cooped up away from society for months on end. It must have taken them six months to find out. Then they started using visions of beautiful women as bait."

The Commander frowned in thought for a moment, then slammed his fist down on the desk. "This thing has got to be investigated and put under control!" He

pressed a stud on the intercom.

"Send in Captain Thorne," he ordered crisply.

THE INVESTIGATING TEAM

Landed on Quendar III four days later, with Captain Thorne of the Fourth Interstellar Squadron as head troubleshooter. Accompanying the Captain were two Sergeants: Sergeant MacIlroy, who was a big, broadshouldered man with hamlike hands, an easy smile, and crisp, dark, hair, and Sergeant Davis, smaller by a head but concealing a sharp, fast-thinking brain under the tight-fitting General Issue space helmet. Captain Thorne was only slightly taller than Sergeant Davis, with short-cropped light hair and cool blue eyes. It was an efficient team; Larsen had chosen them carefully.

The three spacers stood by their ship, which they had set down on the landing field a hundred yards from the now-deserted base. The dome looked lifeless and empty.

Sergeant MacIlroy put his big fists on his hips and shook his head slowly. "So the whole bunch of them just walked out because they saw a bunch of dames! I can't figure it."

"You a woman-hater, MacIlroy?" Captain Thorne asked.

MacIlroy roared. "Some chance! I like a pretty girl as well as any-

one - - but I'd never desert an outpost base to follow one off into the woods on an alien planet."

Sergeant Davis grinned. "Me neither."

Captain Thorne chuckled softly. "According to Dr. Phelps, we may have a chance. It depends on how long it actually takes the Sirens to probe our minds. If it really took them six months, we'll make it. If not - -"

"Yeah," said MacIlroy. "If not, we'll all three go the way of the others."

The captain nodded. "All right. Let's take a look around. We have to find out what happened to those men. This ground is pretty soft; maybe we can find footprints."

They made a rapid survey. After about five minutes of examining the terrain, MacIlroy shouted, "Over here!"

Thorne and Davis trotted quickly to him. He was pointing to the ground, at tracks leading off into the dense jungle. "They went this way."

"Shall we follow them, Captain?" Sergeant Davis asked uneasily.

The captain frowned and nodded affirmatively. "We don't have much to worry about unless we're caught in their trap. Any animal that has to use bait to capture its prey isn't dangerous unless you fall

for the bait in the first place." Thorne paused, and after a moment looked at MacIlroy. "Just keep your eyes open for any stray Loreleis, that's all."

MacIlroy grinned. "Don't worry, Captain. I'll yell if I see anything worth noticing."

"Good. Let's go, then."

THEY STARTED into the jungle, MacIlroy in the lead, the captain in the middle, and Sergeant Davis bringing up the rear. The jungle of Quendar III was similar to the rain-forests of South America, except that, since Quendar III was cooler, the vegetation wasn't as thick; it was fairly easy to walk through.

Captain Thorne was keeping both eyes peeled for danger. Most of the animals that scampered through the forest were no bigger than mice, and, according to the reports, there was no known animal on Quendar III larger than a small dog.

They saw tiny, deerlike grazing animals in one grassy clearing, but they bounded off quickly as soon as the three humans approached.

"It looks peaceful enough," said Sergeant Davis.

"So does a pretty girl," said MacIlroy. "But they can be dangerous, all the same."

Sergeant Davis snorted, and even Thorne joined the laughter. "You are *so* right, MacIlroy. But these Sirens are evidently a lot more dangerous than any human female you've ever met."

MacIlroy glanced back at the captain, a wide grin on his face. "I don't believe in contradicting an officer, Captain, but I'm not so sure that the human female isn't the deadliest form of life in the Galaxy - - when it wants to be."

"These Sirens sound deadly enough to suit me," said Davis.

"A little less banter and a little sharper watching," Captain Thorne said. "Remember that we're facing an alien intelligence that wiped out an entire base here."

MacIlroy and Davis nodded gravely. The three of them marched on, MacIlroy in the lead, his eyes following the heavy footprints of boots in the damp ground. Over this path, the entire personnel but one of the Quendar III base had come dashing madly, pursuing the lovely visions that danced before their eyes.

Suddenly, MacIlroy stopped, lifting his head to peer through the low-hanging purple-leaved trees.

He raised a finger and pointed. "Look! A girl!" He paused, as if fighting some battle within himself, and then said, "She's beckon-

ing to us - - as though she were in trouble - - or - - or - - " His voice trailed off.

The other two followed where his finger was pointing.

Captain Thorne glanced at Sergeant Davis. "Do you see her?"

The sergeant nodded. "Yeah, I see her."

"So do I."

Before them, standing at the base of a great, thick-boled tree crusted with vines, was a girl clad only in the flowing crown of red hair that tumbled down to her shoulders. Her breasts, high and rounded, were partially - - tantalizingly - - concealed by an arching tree-limb, and her long, slim legs were hidden to the knee by the upstanding blades of grass. She stretched out a hand to them.

MacIlroy started moving forward. "Come on!" he shouted. "She's in trouble; we've got to help her!"

Captain Thorne and the sergeant exchanged glances and then plunged on after MacIlroy, who, by this time, had started to run.

None of them said a word during the next few minutes. They were running through the forest, following a beautiful nude girl who always seemed to be just a little ahead of them, waving her lovely arms to urge them forward.

But, as they ran, the captain

kept watching, searching the jungle beyond the running figure of the girl.

Suddenly, Captain Thorne raised a hand and said: "Stop! I see it! Look at that thing!"

WITH ONE SWEEP of a practiced hand, the officer drew a ray pistol and fired. A violet beam of light spurted out, searing its way through and past the nude girl, burning a tree-like mass of vegetation beyond her.

Immediately, the girl vanished. She winked out like a snuffed candle.

Thorne nodded grimly, at the confirmation of the theory. The Captain had recognized the plant for what it was - - a huge, carnivorous plant, probably related to the Venus Flytrap of Earth. Only - - these were intelligent! They had projected a mental image of a girl that had - -

Suddenly, another girl appeared, and the captain realized that there were others of the plants in the vicinity. The girl stepped forward, walking with a swaying, undulating motion.

"Why do you harm us?" she asked, in a throbbing, throaty voice. She stretched out her arms towards them. Sunlight glinted off the whiteness of her breasts, and her face was a mask of yearn-

ing.

Lips clamped in a tight line, Thorne raised the ray pistol a second time.

And then, suddenly, MacIlroy struck the gun aside. "You can't shoot her, Captain!" he cried. "She's too beautiful! We must go to them!"

"They've got you, MacIlroy," Thorne said pityingly. The captain knew now that MacIlroy was completely under the insidious hypnotic spell of the carnivore trees. Sergeant Davis seemed to realize it at the same time. As MacIlroy started to walk toward the trees again, Davis grabbed him around the knees in a flying tackle. The two of them went down on the soft ground in a knot of arms and legs.

"Hold him down there!" Thorne ordered. The captain grabbed the ray pistol and fired it at another tree. By this time, there were several nude female figures dancing around, beckoning coyly with swaying bodies and half-parted lips.

Thorne paid no attention. The ray pistol fired again, and another tree crumpled into smoking ruin. *If I can knock them all out in time,* Thorne thought, *MacIlroy will regain his senses and - -*

Suddenly Thorne glanced around just in time to see Sergeant Davis go reeling backward over the ground and sprawl into an uncon-

scious heap. MacIlroy had been victorious over the smaller sergeant.

"Stop firing!" MacIlroy yelled. "Stop it!" He stepped over Davis' unconscious form and came charging toward the captain.

"Get back, MacIlroy!" Captain Thorne ordered, gesturing with the blaster. But MacIlroy was not cowed by the gun. Perhaps he knew Thorne would not shoot him; perhaps he was simply inflamed by the lure of the Sirens. But he came on relentlessly.

Thorne holstered the blaster - - there was no sense pretending it would be used on MacIlroy - - and waited for the heavy-set sergeant to come.

"I won't let you kill them!" MacIlroy said thickly. His voice was almost half a sob. He stepped in and swung a vicious right that whistled past Thorne's head. The Captain sidestepped and hit MacIlroy solidly on the jaw, rocking the big man for a moment.

But only a moment. He recovered balance and veered in on the much smaller Thorne, extending powerful hands. Thorne licked a few tentative, uncertain blows toward MacIlroy, then had to dodge as a massive fist swung up in a pile-driver blow. Thorne reached out, grasped the fist, and twisted.

Then, applying a judo hold, the

captain sent the astounded MacIlroy flying head-over-heels in the air. The sergeant slammed against the ground hard, and lay still.

"Come on, Davis," Thorne said. "Unlimber your gun. We'll have to cut these monsters down before MacIlroy wakes up."

WHEN they returned to the clearing, MacIlroy was sitting on a log, holding his head in his hands.

"Brother!" he said vehemently. "How could I have been so stupid?"

"Not stupid," said the captain. "You were just susceptible. The trees had had six months to analyze the masculine mind, so they knew females would tempt you. They had you pegged. But they had no way of knowing that would

not work on Davis and me."

MacIlroy grinned. "I guess they picked the wrong bait for you. They should have known better than to start up with women - - I said you were the deadliest species."

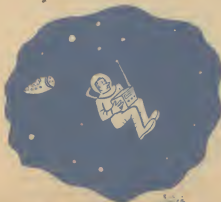
"Speaking of which," said Sergeant Sally Davis, "I think I owe you something."

She stepped over, and, to MacIlroy's astonishment, landed a right to the big sergeant's jaw that knocked him off the log.

MacIlroy got up slowly, rubbing his jaw. "What was that for?"

"That," Davis said, "is for hitting a lady."

Captain Nell Thorne ran her fingers through her short, blonde hair. "Come on, you two - - knock off the horseplay. We've got to get back and make our report!"



"Friend, do you feel left out of things - -
lonely, lost and blue? Then try our - - -"

Letters

from the Readers

MORE MENTAL SCIENCES

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I have just finished reading your comments on Reuben Hepner's letter in the September issue. I am afraid our opinions differ on the subject of what is good science fiction.

Not often do I feel called upon to write to a magazine, but I feel that your statement about science fiction which deals with psychology is uncalled for. I think that science fiction should be written about the mental sciences just as well as the physical ones.

I suppose the reason I feel this way is that I'm such an old and sophisticated reader (I'm 16 and have been reading science fiction since I was 10). In my opinion the only difference between "space opera" and "vintage stuff" is that the vintage stuff is better written and has better plots. (More attention to detail.)

Don't get the impression that I don't like *Madge* and *Tales*. I do.

It's just that the only good kind of science fiction is not space opera.

Now for what I like. The cover of the September issue was good, especially the 3-D effect of the space scene. I would say it was excellent, except I dislike those two shades of orange and blue. The stories were good - - but my favorite part of the magazine is the cartoons. All stf magazines should have as good cartoons as yours!

Charles Sewell
2622 N. Flores
San Antonio, Texas

We didn't mean to imply that the only type of science fiction is the space opera. Sure it's good, but those dealing with telepathy, time travel, parallel worlds, teleportation, etc., are fine too. Whole point revolves around our contention that "action science fiction" is the best. You can have plenty of action in all of the types mentioned here, and that's what we'll provide! wh

STOP LOOKING!

Dear Bill Hamling:

Just finished the September issue of TALES and I agree with the majority of its readers that it is one of the best magazines in the s-f field.

The lead novel by Darius John Granger, OPERATION DISASTER! was above average, but the best story in the issue was Paul Fairman's "I'll Think You Dead!" and also the Milton Lesser short, "The Music of the Spheres". As usual, Forrest J. Ackerman was up to par with his SCIENTIFILM MARQUEE.

My only regret is that I can't always find IMAGINATION and IMAGINATIVE TALES at my neighborhood newsstand.

Alan R. Fridkin
150 Crown St.
Brooklyn 25, N.Y.

We regret what you regret too, Alan. But that's the way it goes with popular books like Madge and Tales. But you can stop fretting and regretting - - simply turn to page 130 and send in your subscription. You'll get your copies every issue and weeks ahead of newsstand publication w/h

A GOOD FIND

Dear Bill:

I have just recently become interested in science fiction, and when I saw your September issue on the stands I only had to glance once through it to know it was for me!

Although I have read some science fiction in other magazines, I was not satisfied. But the stories you print really suit me fine. In the September issue I particularly enjoyed OPERATION DISASTER!



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and I'LL THINK YOU DEAD!
The rest were good too - - and the
cartoons especially so!

If all your stories in future issues are as action-packed as those I've just finished reading, I know I've found what I want in science fiction. Here's my subscription. . .

Gerald C. Cramer
5719 Durocher Ave.
Montreal, Que., Canada

Welcome into the fold Gerald. And we're happy to assure you that you have found exactly what you want in good science fiction. A lot more coming up. Now try our companion magazine IMAGINATION. You'll like Madge too. wh

BATTING ZERO

Dear Bill Hamling:

I have just read IMAGINATIVE TALES for September and I have this to say: "Phew!"

It was downright lousy. I should have spent my 35c on a supply of garbage pail liners. Where's the "action-packed" science fiction you promised on the cover?

You've hit an all-time low in the science fiction field.

Bill Desmond
77 E. Fourth St.
South Boston 27, Mass.

You've just got to stop doing your reading in garbage pails and join the rest of us out on our galactic patio. Action you want? Well, man, you must have been zipping like a Plutonian Glorphy to think the September issue was slow-paced. How's this issue for speed? wh

NOW YOU'RE TALKING

Dear Bill Hamling:

I bought my first copy of TALES only yesterday. I enjoyed it more than any other science fiction magazine I've read. To put it simply: I like your stories. They're different, somehow. Better! And your cartoons are really tops!

In the September issue I purchased I especially liked THE MUSIC OF THE SPHERES. Its theme of saving Earth, rather than destroying it, appealed to me.

You say that actions speak louder than words. To prove that I really like TALES, here's my subscription.

Roger Nelson
89 Coopertown Rd.
Bryn Mawr, Pa.

A better way to prove it hasn't been thought of. Welcome aboard, Rog. - - And here's a cordial invite to all the tens of thousands of our readers. Send in your subscription too. Today! wh

EDITOR'S SONG

Dear Bill:

Here's a little poem I whipped out for the benefit of TALES and MADGE readers:

*S-F fans are mighty funny
Loath to part with hard-earned
money.*

Although subscriptions save them cash

*They risk the newsstands - -
ain't that rash?*

*But save frustration, listen, bub,
For TALES and MADGE - -
send in that sub!*

SP-3 Edward C. Andrews
RA 28 046 736
Det. E, 8614 D.U.

APO 724

Seattle, Wash.

'Nuff said! wth

PAGING FAN LETTERHACKS!

Dear Bill:

I knew it - - I knew that Darius John Granger would come up with another fine yarn. OPERATION DISASTER! in the September issue was even better than his previous GATEWAY TO INFINITY in May. Granger is constantly improving.

For second place (and I don't care what anyone else says!) I pick Henry Still's CHRISTOPHER HART'S BORKLE. This is the best short story published in TALES this year. Ditto for MADGE. This is also the best story Still ever wrote.

The other stories were all extremely hard to rate. And that means that the September issue is the best ever. There is only one exception: THE MUSIC OF THE SPHERES by Milton Lesser. I got tired of this type of story ages ago. After I finished it I said mentally,

"So what?" Tell Lesser to slow down!

Cartoons are as funny as ever! Know what I wish, Bill? I wish IMAGINATIVE TALES and IMAGINATION were longer, that's what I wish. 'Bout 164 pages. While I'm on the subject, here's my idea of the digest-sized dream: monthly, 164 pages containing 120 pages of fiction, a 15 page letter column, a 15 page fan column, and guest editorials.

As far as TALES goes, nothing needs improvement. Let's have more letters from fans, though. Seems as though only plain old readers write in! My Ghod, are fans getting timid? C'mon, fen - - write in to TALES and MADGE!

Marty Fleischman

1247 Grant Ave.

Bronx 56, N.Y.

We'll second the motion, but go a step further and invite all the readers too. We'll close, reminding everyone of our new feature, THE COSMIC PEN-CLUB which is announced in our editorial this issue on page 4. Now to close, turn the page and subscribe! wth

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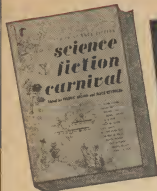
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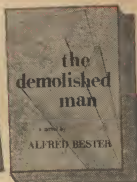
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